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Casting the Men in the Gray Flannel Suits: *Mad Men* and the Practices of Authoring TV History

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Casting the Men in the Gray Flannel Suits: *Mad Men* and the Practices of Authoring TV History

by

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Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2018

Abstract

Casting the Men in the Gray Flannel Suits: *Mad Men* and the Practices of Authoring TV History

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2018

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Abstract: Drawing on the Harry Ransom Center's recently acquired *Mad Men* production archives, this thesis uses the lens of casting to consider authorial agency in the critically acclaimed AMC series. By following the role of recurring, limited guest, and background actors in the first season's writing, casting, and marketing, this thesis challenges the popular narrative of showrunner Matthew Weiner's centrality as a creative authorial figurehead. In addition, this project considers Weiner and his production team's investment in making the show an "accurate" representation of the 1960s. Though crucial to maintaining the show's "quality" status, the labor of recurring, guest, and background actors as bodies that appear "period accurate" is often obscured by the contribution of more famous players, like Weiner and the show's principal cast. Drawing from work in TV studies, industry studies, and cultural studies, this thesis examines the production cultures and ideologies surrounding the claims to "authenticity" and "legitimacy" of the show — both as a faithful visual analogue of 1960s New York and as part of the cohort of post-network era "quality television."

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INTRODUCTION

Mad Men, Making History

Before the start of my second semester at the University of Texas, I heard that UT's Harry Ransom Center was acquiring Matthew Weiner's production archives for the television series *Mad Men* (2007-2015), and my interest was immediately piqued. *Mad Men* is one of my favorite TV series, and a lot of my interest in it comes from a textual fascination with the show and its characters. But I loved the idea of challenging my interest in the text by doing research on everything *but* the episodes themselves — instead looking at how they were written, and what the archival paper trails can tell us about what it was like to work on that set. I had done a bit of archival research as an undergraduate, but on much earlier authors and texts. If Orson Welles' archives included a lot of handwritten memos and still photographs, what would the archives for a television show that aired in our current decade look like?

The fact that these were archives for a *television show* was also notable. Television archives are relatively rare; of the TV materials we have at the HRC, at least, most are buried within larger archives for performers and companies known for their film work.[1] The *Mad Men* archives are unique in that they are for such a recent television text, and one that has garnered such accolades and cultural prestige.

The archive's acquisition by the University of Texas was announced on January 12, 2017. According to a press release on *UT News*, series creator Matthew Weiner and

[1] Although the University of Maryland at College Park and the University of Wisconsin at Madison also have extensive television archives worth noting.

production company Lionsgate donated the archives, which would include "script drafts and notes, props, costumes, digital records and video relating to the creation, production, and marketing of the series."[2] On the importance of the archives, the HRC's film curator Steve Wilson said, "*Mad Men* is a groundbreaking program, noteworthy for the high quality of its writing, acting, and design, as well as for the insightful depiction of American culture through the lens of the past [...] Through the *Mad Men* holdings, students and scholars will gain new insights into the creative decisions that shaped the series and a greater understanding of the evolution of motion pictures."[3]

The reference to the "evolution of motion pictures" in that quote is especially telling. I first visited the archives with my Research Methods class in the spring of 2017 to do preliminary research, and in his talk to the class Wilson emphasized the value of film history. The HRC also holds the archives of acclaimed film actor Robert De Niro, playwright-screenwriter David Mamet, and classic Hollywood studio mogul David O. Selznick, to name just a few. In acquiring *Mad Men*, the archives are aligning television (or, at least, television series with *Mad Men*'s narrative and visual qualities) classic, prestigious film art. Housing *Mad Men*'s papers in boxes next to those of David Foster Wallace and David Mamet is perhaps an ultimate step toward cultural legitimation.

It is also important to consider the contents of the archives themselves. *Mad Men* is a show that is famous for putting a lot of pre-production labor into research and

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[2] "Emmy and Golden Globe Award-Winning 'Mad Men' Archive Donated to UT's Harry Ransom Center," *UT News*, January 12, 2017, https://news.utexas.edu/2017/01/12/mad-men-archive-donated-to-harry-ransom-center.
[3] Ibid.

production design to emulate the look and feel of the decade. As Wilson noted, the archives contain the historical research that Weiner and his fellow creatives compiled in pre-production, along with the costume sketches, blueprints, and scripts for which that historical research was ultimately utilized. Even before going into the archives, it was apparent from reading the press release about their acquisition that the historical setting of *Mad Men* was part of the archives' draw for the HRC. The historical research on the 1960s was already a mini-archive in itself, and the fact that it is included further legitimizes *Mad Men*.

Although the *Mad Men* archives just became available for full teaching and research use during the spring of 2018, I was fortunate enough to gain early research access to a selection of boxes in the fall of 2017. I went to the archives with the lofty goal of looking through everything I could find regarding casting for every season of the show. Casting was a part of production I had always found fascinating, but before beginning research for this thesis I had never read about casting in any of my media studies classes. I knew the archives contained Weiner's handwritten notes from the casting sessions of every principal, recurring, and single-episode guest actor, and I was curious what factors played into Weiner's and the casting directors' decisions. I was also interested in history, since *Mad Men* was so concerned with situating itself historically, and I wanted to find the boxes of historical research and newspaper clippings that Weiner had preserved for the archives and see how they applied to the casting decisions and the writing of characters more generally.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this thesis, I explore the casting of recurring, limited guest, and background actors as representative of *Mad Men*'s production culture and a place where questions regarding legitimacy and authenticity (of representing the 1960s era in which the show is set, and of Weiner's claims to creative authorial agency) are brought to the forefront. Casting is a historically understudied aspect of media production, especially since it is a site where the aims and agencies of so many production players (writers, casting directors, producers, the actors themselves) come into contention. According to the archives, roles of every size on *Mad Men* were cast with "period accuracy" in mind, working in tandem with writing and marketing to naturalize the specific, idealized version of the 1960s. The *Mad Men* archives allow me unprecedented access into the notes from the show's casting sessions, which, in connection with other production documents, can speak toward the larger production culture and ideologies of the show and the creatives involved.

My main research question is: How do the archival materials surrounding *Mad Men*'s casting process illustrate the production culture of the show — both as an "accurate" reflection of 1960s Manhattan corporate glamour and as part of a network on the cusp of prestige television glory? Sub-questions include: Who are they key players that have a voice in the casting process — AMC executives, Lionsgate executives, the casting directors themselves, Matthew Weiner, episode writers and directors, or others? In what ways do the archival materials reinforce or challenge dominant claims regarding Weiner's creative agency and authorship of the show? How might the power dynamics in

authorship change in the production process, as I follow it through various stages of pre-production (writing, casting) to post-production (marketing)?

In terms of the number of pages in the archives, the production material with the most volume was revisions of episode scripts. How do character descriptions — and their subsequent revisions by episode writers and by Matthew Weiner himself — contribute to our understanding of *Mad Men*'s casting process, and to the broader cultural and industrial context of *Mad Men*'s production? More broadly, how are the decisions for casting guest stars and bit characters made? In addition to the audition notes, how do other archival materials surrounding casting (script notes, press kits, etc.) extend our understanding of the casting process? How are the processes of casting recurring guest stars, limited guest stars, and background actors similar and different from how leads are cast?

Looking at the first season of the show as my primary case study provides me with manageable research parameters, and allows me to investigate the show at a crucial moment. For the Sterling Cooper gang in the textual world of *Mad Men*, this moment is 1960, before the major advances in civil and women's rights that would eventually catch up to the show's narrative. For the production of *Mad Men*, this moment is the critical first season of a prestige cable drama, when world-building and establishing the quality and tenor of the show is important for everyone working behind the scenes.

INTERVENTIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

My investigation of primary sources will be supplemented by theories and previous scholarship in the fields of media industries, production studies, and television authorship, and by the abundant scholarship on *Mad Men* that already has been published. Apart from Kristen J. Warner's 2015 monograph *The Cultural Politics of Colorblind TV Casting*, not much has been written about casting as a site of production and authorship, and much of the *Mad Men* scholarship has been from researchers in English or philosophy departments. In my project, I aim to bring these divergent theoretical frameworks and media studies subfields into conversation with one another.

This research project also contributes to a growing body of historical, archival research in media industries, such as Thomas Schatz's examination of Hollywood cinema in the 1940s and Cynthia Meyers' writing on the 1950s' golden age of television and advertising. Of course, scholars have been doing industries research for decades, but media industries scholarship has been especially developed and diversified over the last ten years. As I mentioned earlier, television archives are relatively rare, especially for a TV series as recent as *Mad Men*.

Since they have only become publicly available as of March 2018, the *Mad Men* archives have not yet been examined and written about in any capacity apart from the preliminary work that graduate students have done for Schatz's archival research course at UT. The *Mad Men* archives are uncatalogued, fresh, and completely exciting. Apart from the novelty of the materials themselves, my research is novel in that it looks at supporting and guest performers as below-the-line laborers — performance and labor is a

growing topic of interest within media industries, and is relatively under-researched, at least according to the literature I surveyed in my review. With this research project, I hope to bridge the gaps between industry studies, television studies, and cultural studies through historical research and with an eye toward production practices.

I: Production Cultures

To augment my discussion of the production of *Mad Men,* I intervene in production studies, a subfield of media industry studies. As part of its scope, production studies analyzes media work, labor cultures, and creative environments. Work in production studies utilizes a variety of methods in order to address the challenges that come with this kind of work, but much of production studies research uses ethnographic methods, such as interviews and participant observation. Degree of access for researchers is a particular challenge in this subfield, and especially so for ethnography.

When looking at below-the-line laborers, as Vicki Mayer does in her book *Below the Line: Producers and Production Studies in the New Television Economy,* participant observation, ethnography, and interviews can grant researchers insight into labor conditions and production cultures. The more specialized the media work, the more likely the workers are to grant scholars access. However, above-the-line media workers, especially studio and network executives, often do not want to talk to scholars. In several of his projects, Jonathan Gray has done research on paratexts, or the ephemera surrounding media texts, including promotional materials. Analyzing marketing and industry-circulated materials also provides insight into the production culture of the

show, if in a different way. If I were to ask, I do not imagine Matthew Weiner would want to talk with me about his representation of history and level of authorship on his TV show — or, at least, perhaps not as candidly as I would like him to. But having access to the paratextual materials (not to mention the casting notes for the program), including pilot and Emmy season mailers, grants me access into how AMC framed his involvement in shaping *Mad Men*'s history.

The subfield's diversity lends itself to the publication of edited collections, which show the scope of methodologies and topics that can be covered through this frame of research. *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries,* a collection edited by production studies scholars John Caldwell, Vicki Mayer, and Miranda Banks, illustrates the breadth of a wave of recent scholarship on production studies, specifically, and presents a diverse body of scholarship in this rapidly growing subfield. (A second edition, featuring several additional essays, was published in 2015, demonstrating that scholars are continuing to generate new production cultures research.) Essays in these collections are organized by theme — historical production studies, writing on the producer and identity, geographies of production, and the importance of the everyday, lived experience.

Kristen J. Warner's book *The Cultural Politics of Colorblind Casting* may be the closest analogue to the type of research I am undertaking with this project. But Warner's research questions, which focus on the politics of how casting directors choose which actors to star in their films and TV shows, is informed by participant observation, whereas mine is not. Warner is looking at contemporary TV texts, including *Friday Night*

Lights (2006-2011) and *The Leftovers* (2014-2017), which filmed in the city where she was doing academic research. Since *Mad Men* has been over for several years, this is not a feasible method to study the politics of the show's casting. But the archival materials grant just as much insight into the process, if not more. The presence of a participant observer inevitably alters the nature of the place and interactions they are studying. The archives were assembled for researchers' use, but the materials inside of them are records of conversations that happened behind closed doors. One method does not yield more "honest" results than another, but the archival materials do grant access into the politics of decision making in a similar way to participant observation.

As much of the archival materials of media in university libraries prioritizes film over television, much of the production studies research that utilizes archival methods is also centered around film. Work that looks at authorship and agency as it is represented in archival materials is also often focused around film texts. For example, Thomas Schatz's article "A Triumph of Bitchery: Warner Bros., Bette Davis, and *Jezebel*" utilized the Warner Bros. archives at the University of Southern California to examine the construction of Bette Davis' star persona in her early film roles. R. Colin Tait's PhD dissertation, *Robert De Niro's Method: Acting, Authorship, Agency in the New Hollywood 1967-1980*, illuminated De Niro's role as an author and actor through the University of Texas at Austin's recently acquired De Niro archives. The themes that Schatz and Tait examine in their work — fraught issues of authorship and agency in production cultures — will be at the center of my work, though I will combine them with the TV-centric approaches Warner takes in her research. It is also worth noting that

Schatz and Tait's research was on texts that had completed production several decades before they were researching in the archives. The existence of such contemporary materials as the *Mad Men* archive is extremely rare, and offers me the opportunity to gain insights into production cultures and politics that are relevant and happening on TV production sets today.

Also helpful is Miranda Banks' article for the *Cultural Studies* journal, "Oral History and Media Industries: Theorizing the Personal in Production Studies." The piece provides an oral history of the lived experiences of Hollywood writers, focusing on how industrial and economic changes have shifted the labor of their craft, and how their liminal status in the industry (as both insiders and outsiders to production) shapes their collective status. In the article, Banks uses oral history and interviews as her main methodologies — she recognizes that the memories and limits of their retelling may be fraught, but she also embraces their stories for all their subjectivity. But in the *Mad Men* archives, the history of the production was already printed and bound before it was given to archival researchers. The same issues — industrial and economic pressures of a post-network, contemporary TV setting — are told through the archives, but without the issues of oral history. Oral histories and interviews, for all their value, are always subject to the imperfect, error-prone human memory.

Kate Fortmueller's piece for *Journal of Film and Video*, "Pay to Play: Booking Roles in the Post-Network Era," is also helpful as a model for my project, despite the differences in methods. Fortmueller combines interviews with industrial, economic analysis to explore the challenges facing actors working in today's post-network,

conglomerate-dominated Hollywood. In her interviews with a variety of film and television actors at various points in their career, Fortmueller draws parallels between performer labor and the below-the-line media workers. Fortmueller situates her industrial research on actors within the post-network, 21st-century moment she is writing in, and my own work on *Mad Men* also carefully situates the show within the industrial trends and contexts of 2007.

II: Television Studies, Authorship and the Television Industry

The Television Will Be Revolutionized, Amanda Lotz's foundational book on the major industrial transformations in contemporary television, examines how shifting institutional conditions and political, cultural, and technological landscapes throw the "post-network" industry (and our cultural understanding of the medium) into crisis. Lotz focuses on how cable, niche markets, and emerging platforms enable different storytelling and distribution practices. The book's methodologies are diverse, and include interviews with industry executives, ethnographic field notes from attending industry summits and meetings, discourse analysis of trade publications, and textual analysis of various 21st-century television series. Apart from its status as a crucial text on post-network TV, the first edition of *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* was also published in 2007 — the year that the first season of *Mad Men* premiered — and features an incredibly detailed, multifaceted, and relevant survey of the industry at that moment in time.

The rhetoric surrounding "quality television" dates back to scholarship by Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr, and Tise Vahimaji's writing about MTM Enterprises' narratively complex sitcoms and procedural dramas, but in 2007, "quality" had a different contextual meaning. Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine delve deeper into a discussion of media convergence and the legitimation of "quality" TV in their book *Legitimating Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status*. As television programs like *Mad Men* became aligned with "high quality" (i.e. "high-earning") media and audiences, the shows' marketing positioned them as distinct from old, ordinary, plebeian TV as they pursued a more masculine, educated audience. Newman and Levine consider the distinction of "quality" television relating to the race, class, and gender structures operating within taste cultures. *Legitimating Television*, first published in 2012, is a snapshot into how scholars and audiences situated *Mad Men* while it was airing. The show's alignment with historical setting and subjects, cinematic visuals and narratively complex writing style[4], and Weiner's attachment as an author lent *Mad Men* cultural legitimacy — and contributed to a cultural moment where similar shows earned their "quality" label by aligning themselves with masculinity and "prestige."

In their article "Theorizing Television's Writer-Producer: Re-Viewing *The Producer's Medium*," Alisa Perren and Thomas Schatz argue that writing on types of "quality" TV is the only place in the field of television studies that discussion of authorship has typically come into play. Perren and Schatz write that "despite the

[4] See also: Jason Mittell's *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*.

significant increase in both the number and the visibility of top series showrunners, there have been relatively few studies focused specifically on television authorship more generally since [Horace Newcomb's] *The Producer's Medium* was published some three decades ago."[5] In "Television Production: Who Makes American TV?," Jane Shattuc argues that celebrating the aesthetic and narrative qualities of television and elevating its authors would reproduce cultural taste hierarchies. I agree that prizing authorial intent is not useful for television studies, but I believe that it is possible to write about authorship on television while still considering the complex negotiations of producers, workers, and audiences who create meaning. The *Mad Men* archives bear Weiner's authorial and curatorial stamp, as do almost all Weiner's own production documents, and were assembled and donated to the HRC by Weiner himself. But in this project, I seek to challenge (oversimplified) popular discourses around Weiner's sole creative agency in producing the show.

III: Mad Men, Critical and Popular Perspectives

With much of the scholarship published on *Mad Men*, the fact that it is a product of the commercial television industry is not foregrounded. Many of the essays published in edited collections on *Mad Men* are written by English or philosophy scholars who frame the show as a piece of literature or a moral puzzle, and do not engage with the show with its context in a larger television landscape. While it is valuable to analyze plot

[5] Alisa Perren and Thomas Schatz, "Theorizing Television's Writer-Producer: Re-Viewing *The Producer's Medium*," *Television & New Media* 16, no. 1 (2015): 86-93.

and narrative, coming from a media studies perspective, it seems antithetical to look at a television show as something other than a group-created work that mediates production from a vast collection of stakeholders and co-creatives. And as a work of the "quality," "second golden age" television created by post-*Sopranos* showrunner-auteurs, it made sense for scholars like Newman and Levine (who were writing as the show was still airing new episodes) to analyze the visual and narrative aspects of the show. Attempting to write with historical distance about media that is being produced contemporaneously is a unique challenge, and surely one that I grapple with in my project, since *Mad Men* has only been off the air for three years.

Mad Men is often discussed in critical and academic circles as creatively inseparable from its showrunner, Weiner. Many of the countless popular and journalistic pieces published during *Mad Men*'s run detail how much of a fastidious control freak Weiner was in conveying his vision in every script line and every prop detail of *Mad Men*, and it is often taken for granted that he is the singular author of the show. None of these works mention casting as a key site where Weiner's (constructed) authorial agency is visible, but Weiner's role in casting is a central theme in the archives. The archives, with their inclusion of the casting notes and script annotations detailing key character changes, provide rich primary source material to fill this gap in scholarship. The notes and annotations are Weiner's, of course, but I aim to contextualize and challenge Weiner's centrality.

The introduction to *Analyzing Mad Men: Critical Essays on the Television Series,* written by Scott Stoppard, frames the themes of show in terms of Weiner's aims. The

introduction includes quotes from press interviews with Weiner that are taken at face value and not explored in any depth subsequently: "I'm interested in how people respond to change. Are they excited by the change, or are they terrified that they'll lose everything they know? Do they recognize that change is going on? That's what the show is all about."[6] The rest of the edited collection contains essays musing on themes brought up by the show's narrative, such as theology, feminism, and late capitalism. Weiner's sole authority in writing these themes is assumed.

Journalist Brett Martin's crossover book, *Difficult Men,* bridges critical writing of authorship with production studies and centers the conversation around the creative genius of the anti-hero television writer-producer-author. Martin aligns the brash, often unlikeable behaviors and ideologies of characters like Don Draper and Tony Soprano with the ruthlessness of the showrunners who worked on those shows. Martin combines interviews with showrunners and TV writers with historical research and popular industrial analysis. As someone who is also undertaking historical and industrial analysis of a cable anti-hero show, I find Martin's analysis to be reductive and needlessly male-centric, but I believe this book is still useful as an example of how previous scholars and critical writers have approached *Mad Men* and Weiner's creative involvement.

In a more academic vein, communication scholar Gary R. Edgerton edited *Mad Men: Dream Come True TV,* which features several essays that are more along the lines of the production studies-focused work I am undertaking with this project— including a

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[6] Scott Stoppard, introduction to *Analyzing Mad Men: Critical Essays on the Television Series*, ed. Scott Stoppard (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), 3.

piece that political science/political economist Gary R. Johnson wrote about the production history of the show. Lauren M. E. Goodland, Lilya Kaganovsky, and Robert A. Rushing edited a collection on *Mad Men* and its historical context, *Mad Men, Mad World: Sex, Politics, Style and the 1960s*. Shawn Shimpach wrote a journal article on a similar topic, considering *Mad Men* as exemplary of the historical periods it represents within the diegesis of the show and indicative of industry and historical trends in the mid-to-late 2000s. *New York Magazine* television critic Matt Zoller-Seitz compiled his previously published critical essays about the show for an illustrated collection, *Mad Men Carousel*. I hope to add to the work done in these pieces, situating *Mad Men* within its industrial context, while also utilizing the unique opportunities for firsthand insight that the archival materials afford me.

By looking for evidence of other stakeholders and other authors that contributed to the production of *Mad Men* at one locus (casting), I want to shed light on the complex team dynamics in *Mad Men*'s production. It is tempting to analyze *Mad Men* as a text full of half-hidden meanings, moral quandaries, and gorgeously composed images, created by one fascinating and complicated man. But with the availability of the archival materials and the bit of distance we have from the show now that it is over, taking a more historical and industry-focused approach to the show is possible.

METHODOLOGY

In this project, I use the University of Texas at Austin's *Mad Men* archival collections to look at issues of authorship, historical representation, and the production

culture of the show as they are represented within the archives. For my first chapter, I consult the episodic scripts for each of the 13 episodes in season one of *Mad Men*, analyzing the character descriptions as a site of authorship within the writer's room, and look at the dual function of character descriptions as allegories within the story and blueprints for casting, noting how markers of identity like age, race, and sexuality might be represented in each. My second chapter uses Matthew Weiner's notes for episode casting sessions to look at how those same markers of identity are negotiated in the casting process. The materials in the boxes corresponding to the season one finale, "The Wheel," also contain industry-circulated press kits and Emmy promotional materials that I perform discourse analysis on in my third chapter, with attention to how these promotional materials frame Weiner's engagement with "real" 1960s history and his own authorial role in the production process.

It is important to note that though these archives appear raw and untouched, they have gone through several rounds of mediation. They were donated by Weiner and Lionsgate, and all materials inside have been approved for scholarly research by both parties. As I was performing my research, the archives were still in the process of being cataloged, but there had already been some intervention to eliminate personal information — actors' agents' phone numbers were blacked out of contact sheets, as were their social security numbers and home addresses. The archives contained a few printed-out emails between Weiner and Lionsgate executives, but certainly not every email that was ever sent about the production of the show was printed out for researchers to see and use. Oftentimes, archives are donated to universities by family members of deceased authors

— although UT does have several collections acquired similarly to Weiner's (notably, Mamet's and De Niro's archives), it is still relatively rare for a university library to hold archival records that are less than three years old, as the *Mad Men* archives are. The archives being Weiner's, and being assembled by Weiner himself, means that they are not necessarily an unbiased look at the production culture of the show. These are his marked-up copies of the scripts and production documents, so the experiences of other production workers and of the actors on the show may not be as easily visible as Weiner's experiences. But in this project, I will read between the lines and work within the limitations of the archive. Weiner's centrality to the production process, after all, is mainly constructed after the fact — through gestures as large as Lionsgate donating archives of his production notes to the HRC and as small as AMC marketing him as "the showrunner/writer" in a season one press kit.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

This thesis is organized into three chapters that follow *Mad Men* in three key moments: writing, casting, and marketing. The chapters are organized chronologically — beginning with the writing process, and how character descriptions function as casting blueprints for characters' identities to be drafted and negotiated by the collective of writers even before actors are cast. The notes from casting sessions are a look at Weiner's and the casting directors' priorities when looking for talent to play these characters. Similar issues that concerned the writers — for example, representing the 1960s "accurately" — were also priorities in the casting sessions. The last chapter, which focuses on marketing for the series' pilot and Emmy campaign, shows how these pre-

production concerns were utilized as a marketing strategy for *Mad Men*. Through the progression of the chapters, one can see the other voices in the production process fade into the background as the series gets closer to air, and "period accuracy" (and Weiner's authorial role in creating that accuracy) are sold to viewers.

Chapter One: "A Model Version of Don": Mad Men's Scripted and Embodied Allegories

The first chapter in my thesis analyzes the pre-production process of writing and revising the recurring, guest, and bit characters' descriptions (included in episode scripts with their first appearances). Through tracking the changes to character descriptions, I argue that the chronology of these changes points toward two functions of character descriptions — to work out allegorical and ideological meanings and associations of the characters in the context of the story, and to serve as blueprints for casting actors.

Among the issues I will consider in this chapter: What changes are made before and after the casting process for the episode has been completed? What do the annotations in each of the script binders — Weiner's and the script supervisor's — say about their cultural and ideological approaches to casting? To what extent are the character descriptions an expression of creative authorial intention, and to what extent might this be a site of the writer enacting generic functions, summing up "types" that could be easily cast in a 15-minute audition? More generally, why fine-tune the language used to describe a character in a script, especially when no one watching the show will see or hear the words on the page?

This chapter relies mostly on the archival script materials, and contains the most explicit invoking of a cultural studies (race-class-gender-centric) theoretical framework

alongside the industrial analysis that will structure my entire project. Looking at how race, class, and gender are written into the scripts provides insight into both the writers' interests and priorities in representing the 1960s and insight into the politics and production culture of the show itself, which carries into other moments of production, like casting.

Chapter Two: "Good, Snooty, Meh": Mad Men's Casting Notes as Ideological Battlegrounds

The second chapter explores the casting process itself as a site of artistry and authorship. I look at casting as a form of authorship and how casting might function to further the interests of media workers in more traditional authorial roles — the writer, the actor, the showrunner. In this chapter, I consult the handwritten casting notes that Weiner took at his meetings with Carrie Audino and Laura Schiff, the main casting directors. What questions does Weiner appear to be addressing in his casting notes? What priorities and concerns — including actors' performances, physical attributes, and any "gut feelings" — does Weiner contend with in the notes? To what extent do the notes show Weiner casting with an eye toward the 1960s setting of *Mad Men* — how do the casting notes represent the friction between 2007-era ideals around race, class, gender, and age of performers and the corresponding ideologies of the historical setting? Here, I will intervene with relevant literature in authorship and production studies to shed light on important media workers (guest actors and casting directors) that many other television studies scholars have left unexplored in their own research on the industry.

Chapter Three: "Where the Truth Lies": Mad Men's Press Kits and Post-Production Construction of Quality

The third and final chapter looks at the promotion of the first season of *Mad Men* at two key moments: the weeks before the premiere of the pilot episode in July 2007, and the weeks leading up to the 2008 Emmy Awards nomination, where *Mad Men* submitted for consideration for writing, direction, and performances, among other technical awards. The HRC's archival materials include two key documents I analyze in depth in this chapter: a copy of the press kit sent to journalists before the show's premiere and a promotional mailer sent to Television Academy voters leading up to the announcement of Emmy nominations.

At each of these moments, what strategies did Weiner and the performers use to promote this show as prestigious and "buzzworthy" — despite it airing on a network that had not produced much scripted content up to this point? *Mad Men* also was in the unique position of having a main cast of mostly relative-unknowns and actors with scattershot guest and small recurring TV credits. How did the press kits and Emmy mailers promote the stars of these shows? Which actors (and writers or other production figures) received attention in these promotional paratexts? How much did Weiner's authorial role, especially in casting, shape how *Mad Men* was promoted? How is "history" and *Mad Men*'s rendering of it represented in the show's promotion, and does it align with the construction of the 1960s made visible in other production documents? This chapter also considers how the *Mad Men* archives themselves work toward this function of centralizing Weiner, playing up his creative agency and obscuring the other media

workers with key creative roles in the writing, casting, production, and marketing of the show.

CHAPTER ONE

"A Model Version of Don": *Mad Men*'s Scripted and Embodied Allegories

If one were to measure by page volume, episode scripts were the document that filled the bulk of the boxes of the *Mad Men* archives at the Harry Ransom Center. In my perusal of the materials, I went through 5,000 pages of script revisions for season one alone. Initially, I was surprised to see this many versions of the scripts printed out and bound in the archives that Weiner donated to the university. The binders, ostensibly his "set binders" that he carried around in daily use, were heavy and cumbersome, with seven or eight drafts of the same episode script with small dialogue changes and red-pen markups. One could get lost (or buried) in so much typed dialogue.

The sheer volume of the scripts, though at times frustrating to work with, was also what made them so fascinating to study. For the 13 episodes of the show's first season, *Mad Men*'s writers went through thousands of pages of text in order to create this world and construct their version of the 1960s. The process was highly collaborative, as evidenced by the many shared writing credits on the first season's episodes — some episodes included Weiner as credited writer, but many did not. Every draft was subject to change by the group and to Weiner's own amendments. These archives being Weiner's, the copies of the scripts are Weiner's personal copies, and they are full of his own handwritten notes indicating which character beats work and which lines of dialogue could be cut. But even though the pages were literally marked by his pen alone, perhaps more than any other collection of pages I viewed in the archives, the collaborative nature

of the writer's room is visible in the script revisions. This world was constantly being molded and changed, visible in subtle tweaks of wording over 5,000 pages. The final scripts represent the decisions, reached by consensus, about how to represent the characters and settings.

From draft to draft, there are some trends in the types of changes that were made in the scripts. Dialogue was often added or cut, and scene length was variable. As in any piece of writing, not every detail of a first draft makes it into the final version. Bit characters were written out, languid scenes were shortened, and unnecessary scenes were dropped entirely for time. Notes from AMC, Lionsgate, and other *Mad Men* writers might call for the addition of new scenes for clarity or added intrigue. But to me the most fascinating difference between the versions of the scripts were the character descriptions, where you see the show's broader concern with world-building play out with *people* at the center. People, whether they are characters or real-life production players, have complex nexes of identities and ways they display and engage those identities in the world. *Mad Men*'s place in history — both its 1960 setting and its pivotal position as AMC's prestige flagship show — make getting the minutiae of these characters "right" especially important.

In an episode script or screenplay, character descriptions give the bare bones information the audience needs to know upon first meeting a character. In the pilot episode of *Mad Men*, we first meet Don Draper smoking and sitting alone at a bar, scribbling ideas on how to advertise cigarettes. Weiner's description of the character in the pilot script is "DON DRAPER, early 30s, handsome, conservative, and despite his

third seven and seven, is apparently sober."[7] Even before Jon Hamm's 30-something, handsome face was cast to play the role, readers of this early draft would get an idea of what this character would be like and look like.

Somewhere between the February 2006 draft and the time the crew was shooting the episode that April, one small detail changed in Don's description. Instead of being on his third seven and seven, Don was drinking old fashioneds.[8] The old fashioned would eventually come to be associated with Don — it would be his drink of choice for the whole series. The archive only had two drafts of the pilot script, and there were no notes or markups that indicated why the drink was changed. Did Weiner, who wrote the episode, decide that a two-ingredient cocktail was too simple for Don? Could he not picture his enigmatic antihero protagonist drinking a cocktail made with 7-Up? Did the darker amber color of an old fashioned simply look cooler on screen? Whatever the reason for the change, the old fashioned came to literally define Don upon his first appearance in the shooting script.

The shifting character descriptions are a site where one can see the characters' identities being defined and refined, shaped by the committee of writers into a few words an actor can embody. Since the archives are Weiner's — and only Weiner's line edits are preserved, it is impossible to attribute any changes to his singularly creative vision. There

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[7] 1x01 "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" John Slattery shooting script, February 15, 2006, Box 1 folder 1, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

[8] 1x01 "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" Matthew Weiner shooting script, April 18, 2006, Box 1 folder 2, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

is no way of knowing if it was Weiner or another staff writer who decided Don should drink something tougher than a seven and seven. All we have is the evidence of the changes, the mutable beginnings and printed-out endings of these characters' identities.

Also curious is the rationale for these character descriptions changing at all, especially considering how minimally drafts and shooting scripts circulate during production. Every draft begins with a page specifying that the script is for internal use by "cast and crew ONLY." The character descriptions are only seen by people who are reading the script — executives from AMC and Lionsgate, crew members, other writers, and actors auditioning for the parts.[9] What comes after the character's name will never be verbally reproduced on the screen; no one will narrate Don's age or physical description. But these changes to characters' identities are even more significant because of how narrowly they circulated. Outside of the writer's room, they are blueprints for casting. Inside the writer's room, they are part of the creative fiction-writing process of building this artificial world and the characters who inhabit it.

Characters' race, class, and gender are described in ways that serve this dual function of the character descriptions. Non-white characters, when they are written into the glamorous, white world of Sterling Cooper, exist only in the background, literally defined in the scripts by their jobs and their race. Women's beauty is associated with class standing, whereas when men are described as attractive, it is to set up or underline a

[9] The archives contained printed out emails from Lionsgate and AMC executives detailing changes they would like for the scripts, but since the notes were almost all concerning plot or scene timing and never character details or descriptions, I will not look at their notes in depth in this chapter.

future plot point. A curious number of small male roles are described in their character descriptions in comparison with Don, which suggests that the character is so central to the story that the background is filled with his doubles. The descriptions are meant to both be suggestive toward casting and to suggest story beats. They are both "scripts" for actors to follow and "teleplays" that tell allegorically rich, character-driven stories even in preproduction, and without a visual component yet.

For all 13 episodes in *Mad Men*'s first season, I noted and logged the description for every character as they were introduced. I sorted them according to trends I noticed in how the descriptions were written, with a focus on issues of race, class, and gender that come up as thematic concerns both in the narrative of *Mad Men* and the broader production culture of the show. In subsequent drafts, I also noted any changes made to the character descriptions, and on what date the changes were made. The constructed world of *Mad Men*'s 1960 Manhattan was subject to constant change by a variety of authors. The descriptions of the characters are a nexus where you can see the tensions of the production culture and the show's textual setting negotiating against one another.

The collection of these data was often tedious and unrewarding; I logged everything from the correction of spelling errors to the renaming of bit characters. But if the page volume is any indication, these small changes in scripts and revisions were of massive importance in *Mad Men*'s production history. These seemingly small changes would impact narratives in the show for seasons to come, as they set the limits for what would and would not be part of *Mad Men*'s 1960s world.

A BLACK MAN/A CART MAN/THEN SAMUEL

In her book *The Cultural Politics of Colorblind TV Casting,* Kristen J. Warner includes a section about her ethnographic experience as a participant observer during the casting of NBC's *Friday Night Lights* (2006-2011). *Friday Night Lights* was filmed in Austin, TX, but the show was set in the fictional west Texas town of Dillon. Although most of the show's casting of principal roles took place in Los Angeles, many bit characters and background actors were cast locally in Austin. Since Dillon was supposed to be a small, rural town and less racially diverse than Austin, the casting directors hired background actors with that in mind. After sitting in on casting sessions and talking with casting directors and the show's producers, Warner was fascinated by the industry's insistence that casting is based on visuals and merit alone, when surely there were more ideological factors playing into the process. Warner writes, "Regardless of how many diverse looking characters (the casting directors) hired for *FNL,* if the expectation of accuracy only rested on the visual look and background of the actors, the characters would inherently be missing a depth only provided through the cultural experiences they bring as a result of their racial differences."[10] Warner describes the depth that the actors bring to their performance and the limits of casting based on race. If an actor of color is hired to embody a type or represent a body that fits in the world of the text, he or she is often not afforded the same specificity that more unmarked performers are. To the casting directors they are defined by their race, not their performance style or the unique spin

[10] Kristen J. Warner, *The Cultural Politics of Colorblind TV Casting* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 38.

they bring to their character. Bodies marked as different bring their corresponding experiences to the screen.

To an extent, I have found Warner's findings to hold true for what I have seen of the *Mad Men* archives. The casting notes, which I look at in more detail in the next chapter, mainly express concern with actors' physical appearance and performance style. There are few speaking roles for Black actors in the first season of *Mad Men*. Similar to the strategy of the *Friday Night Lights* casting directors, Schiff, Audino, Weiner, and everyone else involved with the casting of the show use "verisimilitude" to the "real-life" setting of the show to explain the whiteness of the main cast — and strictly hold to this black and white binary. Both series are fictional, and are not being written or cast with the goal of accurately representing a real group of people who looked a certain way. (At least, not in the same way as a standard biopic might be.) The settings and worlds of the show are the creative works of writers and production teams, and like everything else in production, the choice to cast mainly white background actors was a choice. Warner is troubled that the show passed off its erasure of actors of color as "logic" — they were not in the background because they "would not have been in Dillon." But Dillon, like any fictional rendering of a place or a time, could have looked another way.

If color was erased from the background of *Friday Night Lights,* the reverse is true of *Mad Men*. Blackness is contained only in the margins of the show, since the "high-class" 1960s setting of the show is meant to exclude anyone outside the narrow definition of white, Eurocentric glamour. More often than not, *Mad Men* collapses difference into Black and white. Characters of color are conspicuously absent from most

first season scripts, whether in supporting, guest, or background roles. The only Latino character written into any of the first season is "a handcuffed Puerto Rican man in a bathrobe"[11] who is accosted by the police in "The Hobo Code." A Chinese-American family appears as a racist stereotype in one draft of "The Marriage of Figaro," including a "toothless old woman" who is "squatting over a large, filthy pot boiling on two hot plates"[12] in Pete's office, but in the shooting script she has been replaced by "a traditionally dressed Chinese family" who is "sitting around the office eating"[13] — still a stereotyped, non-speaking role, if a slightly less racist rendering. If *Mad Men*'s 1960 Manhattan does not have room for other minority groups, Blackness stands in to represent all markers of raced difference.

In *Mad Men*'s first season, Black actors were unilaterally cast for small roles as service workers, and the episode scripts often called specifically for a Black performer. "Ladies Room," the second episode of the series, features a scene in which Sterling Cooper employees buy sandwiches from a man selling them at a cart. The episode was first drafted in March 2007, and in the March 16 and March 23 drafts of the script, the character selling the sandwiches was named "Black Man" and specified to be 30 years

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[11] 1x08 "The Hobo Code" Matthew Weiner first draft and shooting script, Box 6 folder 5, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[12] 1x03 "Marriage of Figaro" Matthew Weiner first draft, April 10, 2007, Box 2 folder 5, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[13] 1x03 "Marriage of Figaro" Matthew Weiner shooting script, April 23, 2007, Box 2 folder 5, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

old.[14] By the shooting script (and the script from which auditioning actors would be reading), dated April 24, the character was "a Black cart man, Samuel, 50, in a tan institutional blazer."[15] The choice to name the character is interesting — he does have speaking lines, but no one addresses him by name. Other (white) service workers and bit characters in the first season, like "Old Italian Waiter," "Janitor," and "Two Orderlies" are not given names in the scripts. Samuel's age is also shifted considerably by the time of casting; the archives show dozens of instances of character ages changing from revision to revision, but making Samuel 50 instead of 30 gives the character a different impression. If he is 50 and still working at a sandwich cart, there is the impression that his entire career and place in the world is to serve white people. A younger man might be working part time while he pursues other employment interests. Samuel only appears in the one scene, but the brief impression he leaves is that his whole life is to serve white people, his age a reminder of the unchangeability of this fact. The majority of the Black New Yorkers you see in the first season are service workers whose only narrative significance is to smile in the background and facilitate the comfort of the white characters.

Hollis, who would eventually become a significant character on the show, was written in the pilot episode as just "Elevator Operator" and described as "a middle-aged

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[14] 1x02 "Ladies Room" Matthew Weiner first and shooting drafts of script, March 16-23, 2007, Box 1 folder 4, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

[15] 1x02 "Ladies Room" Matthew Weiner casting session notes, April 24, 2007, Box 1 folder 6, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

Black man."[16] The casting notes for the first episode are not in the archives, so it is impossible to know whether Weiner was so impressed by the actor's performance that he wrote more scenes for Hollis for rest of the season. However, it is more likely that he just became more useful to the story than you might imagine from the pilot alone; quite a few scenes on this show take place in an elevator. Hollis is the only Black recurring character in the entire first season, and seeing that he was initially drafted as a nonspecific "Elevator Operator" indicates that the *Mad Men* writers, at least at this moment in its production, were drafting the scripts specifically keeping characters of color minimally developed and on the margins.

Throughout the years *Mad Men* was on the air Weiner gave interviews saying he was concerned with representing the experiences of minority groups. But in the first season, Weiner and the writers construct their 1960s world as almost uniformly white — characters of color do exist, but more often than not, do not even have speaking roles. They are maids, elevator operators, and waiters, and they wander silently around the background as the white characters have dialogue and storylines. In looking at the scripts and character descriptions as sites of collaborative, writerly creativity, you can see the work to center the show around a specific (white) version of the 1960s. But looking at the scripts as production documents and instructions for casting reveals the assumption of whiteness for any character who was not specifically written to be otherwise. The Black

[16] 1x01 "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" Matthew Weiner shooting script, April 18, 2006, Box 1 folder 2, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

characters are often literally named in the scripts alongside their race — "Black Uniformed Maid," "Black Man." There is no script draft that specifies that Betty Draper is a white woman. The whiteness of *Mad Men*'s 1960 is unstated, but it is still laboriously maintained throughout each script.

SHE'S BEAUTY AND SHE'S GRACE

In the world of *Mad Men*'s 1960, youth and (Eurocentric) attractiveness are synonymous with wealth and glamour. During the first stages of my archival research, I noted that in their character descriptions, many of the main female characters introduced in the pilot episode have descriptions that emphasized their otherworldly beauty. Of course, by comparison, the language describing the male characters (who are also played by attractive actors) is far less exaggerated. But as I read into the archives past the pilot and second episode, I noticed that the descriptions of physical attractiveness are fairly equally applied to male and female characters. Age is not always a factor, either — Mona and Roger are "a dramatic beauty"[17] and "elegant,"[18] respectively, and the 50-something Adele Hobart is "coiffed and comfortable."[19] The more scripts I looked at and changes I

[17] 1x02 "Ladies Room" Matthew Weiner shooting script, April 24, 2007, Box 1 folder 5, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[18] 1x01 "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" Matthew Weiner shooting script, April 18, 2006, Box 1 folder 2, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[19] 1x09 "Shoot" Matthew Weiner shooting script, June 21, 2007, Box 7 folder 8, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

logged, though, I came to notice that the characters' described attractiveness is almost always associated with their class standing.

In the pilot episode, we meet many of the glamorous and gorgeous characters we will be following for the duration of the series. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, Don is described as "early 30s, handsome, conservative, and despite his third seven and seven, is apparently sober."[20] Roger Sterling's introduction is even more fawning — "an elegant WASP with an incredible head of gray hair."[21] Considering how Roger spends the season (throwing up after taking the stairs up to work, getting sloppily drunk at dinner at Don's house and hitting on Betty, having two separate heart attacks), the note of his attractiveness forecasts the direction of his storyline. Noting his handsome, put-together looks at the outset sets Roger up so that he can be taken apart throughout the season. Here is an "elegant" man with a great head of hair, who will eventually turn into the portrait of Dorian Gray, falling to decay while Don enjoys the same marital infidelity, drinking, and double life without the same physical consequences. Roger's handsomeness is a reductive tool from the beginning, and suggests the arc of his character. Women's beauty, on the other hand, is not meant to suggest any future evolution of character. It serves a metaphor for their sexual availability, wealth, and worth.

The three love interests Don juggles throughout the first season are all introduced in the pilot, and each of them is marked by her beauty, but in divergent ways tied to class.

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[20] 1x01 "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" Matthew Weiner shooting script, April 18, 2006, Box 1 folder 2, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[21] Ibid.

Before Don is revealed to be married, he is shown in bed with Midge, his independent, beatnik-type illustrator girlfriend. She is described as "a sexy, no-nonsense woman about Don's age, wrapped in a red kimono."[22] Her choice of lingerie immediately sets her apart from Betty, whom we meet later in the episode, wearing a conservative nightgown. Midge's kimono immediately exoticizes her, and this wardrobe choice is one of the show's only hints that Asian American people and communities exist in New York in the 1960s. Midge's "sexy" descriptor implies beauty, of course, but Rachel and Betty are described with more delicate language. Later in the episode, some of the Sterling Cooper guys go to dinner at a strip club/restaurant, and the working women's outfits and appearance are described in similar ways to Midge — one stripper is a "buxom blonde" and another waitress "scantily clad."[23] Midge is an artist with her own apartment and is evidently doing okay financially, but by not possessing Rachel's extravagant wealth or Betty's wifely legitimacy, Midge is set apart. This is a highly exaggerated and idealized version of the 1960s, where every rich and successful person is elegant, regal, and pristine, and those who indulge their desires but have less money face physical consequences for their actions. In *Mad Men*'s 1960, beautiful women are metaphors.

Mad Men comments upon this dichotomy in the show itself in the season two episode "Maidenform." Paul Kinsey pitches a campaign for Playtex that is based on the idea that all women are either "a Jackie or a Marilyn" — or, as Sal elaborates, "a line or a

[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

curve."[24] By this logic, women are either 1) fiery and sexy or 2) austere and icy (or, at least, men see them according to that binary). Midge is a Marilyn, and Betty and Rachel are Jackies. Rachel is even described in the pilot episode as "early 20s and stunning in a Chanel suit,"[25] the iconic Jacqueline Kennedy uniform. When Betty is introduced at the very end of the pilot episode, she is "29, beautiful despite having just awakened."[26] Again, the pristine quality of her beauty is exaggerated. Betty literally just woke up, but is completely unrumpled and perfect. Her innocence is what makes her beautiful, and it is meant to directly contrast with Midge's roughness. Betty's nightgown is an icy pale blue, compared to the fiery red of Midge's kimono. The imagined attractiveness of these characters — like costumes, set pieces, or props — conveys figurative interpretations of these characters. Through the descriptions of their beauty, these women are set up according to the different roles they fulfill in Don's life, and the show as a whole. Of course, over the season these women will all become much more developed, and the contradictions of their descriptions and initial impressions will become apparent. But the descriptions are character sketches and setups that writers construct and reconstruct carefully.

Like everything else in the descriptions, beauty is subject to amendment. Multiple episode scripts had revisions where a woman's beauty was made more or less

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[24] Matthew Weiner, "Maidenform," *Mad Men* season 2, episode 6, directed by Phil Abraham, aired August 31, 2008 on AMC, accessed via Netflix U.S.
[25] 1x01 "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" Matthew Weiner shooting script, April 18, 2006, Box 1 folder 2, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[26] Ibid.

exaggerated through different language. Again, the reasons for making a character more or less beautiful appear to have allegorical functions. As the episode "Long Weekend" went through several edit cycles, by several different teams of writers, the young women characters in the script saw their beauty de-emphasized and deleted from their descriptions.

This episode is also the first of the season to feature curious changes in writing credits. Unfortunately, the drafts of these scripts in the archives are undated, so I cannot situate them in relation to the rest of the production. But one draft, which I presume to be the earliest because it was changed the most, was written by staff writer Bridget Bedard, and it appears the writing team Andre and Maria Jacquemetton wrote a second draft based on Bedard's original. (Weiner's name appears alongside theirs in the writing credit on the final version of the script, and the Jacquemettons' script is heavily marked by his red pen.)

The Bedard script initially describes Eleanor (then named Charlotte Dalrymple) as "a dark haired beauty in a sundress and high ponytail" and her sister with a "generous bosom,"[27] but the Jacquemettons amended the twins to be "dark-haired in collegiate skirts and blouses."[28] The switch from the sundress to collegiate skirt and blouse indicate that, although the Jacquemettons do not specify their ages in the description, one gathers

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[27] 1x10 "Long Weekend" Matthew Weiner early draft (Bridget Bedard), undated, Box 8 folder 6, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

[28] 1x10 "Long Weekend" Matthew Weiner early draft (Andre and Maria Jacquemetton), undated, Box 8 folder 6, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

that Eleanor and Mirabelle are college-aged. A skirt and blouse are more conservative attire for an advertising audition; even before seeing the actresses they cast for the episode you are supposed to gather the twins are a little bit shy and serious. Roger spends the whole night commenting on the translucence and smoothness of the twins' skin — Eleanor and Mirabelle are not meant to represent sex appeal, but youth and innocence. The Jacquemettons take "beauty" and Mirabelle's generous bosom out of their descriptions, but it is almost beside the point. By this point in the revised script, Don and, especially, Roger are attracted to Eleanor and Mirabelle as physical representations of the youth they wish they could get back. They are not spending the night at the office with Eleanor and Mirabelle because of their beauty or sexual appeal. By this time, their sexual appeal is deleted from the scripts, and their descriptions read as chaste, unsexualized, and girlish — a rarity for female characters in *Mad Men*. But even when beauty, age, and sexuality are literally erased from their descriptions, the women are still written to reflect the male characters' desires, and to underline a beat in the story.

Specifications for attractiveness, then, are not a casting call stipulating that only hot actors read for these parts. The character descriptions have their own function in world-building. The scripts are blank pages where the writers negotiate the ideologies and cultures that the show will later represent in more visual forms. In the case of wealthy characters like Don, Roger, and Betty, descriptions of their physical beauty are meant to indicate that they put a lot of effort and money into their appearance — to suggest something about their background or their character traits and to situate them

within the fictionalized glamorous, cutthroat world of the 1960s business world *Mad Men* takes place in.

If the discussion of "The Long Weekend" is any indication, this constructed world of beauty was not made by Weiner alone. The allegories were shaped by the collective of episode writers across many months and many versions of the scripts, constantly subject to revision according to the "necessities" of the story and of the broader world that the writers were building in these scripts. And if beauty is written as allegorical for central characters, it is even more allegorical for smaller roles. It is how people reading the script can distinguish between the sexy strippers at the restaurant the Sterling Cooper boys go to, the Eleanors and Mirabelles, or their sweet and innocent-faced wives in nightdresses and curlers — even without faces to put to the names.

A MODEL VERSION OF DON

Perhaps the most fascinating character description changes, though, were the ones that were not necessarily altered to make sense in the story, like making Eleanor and Mirabelle less sexy or giving Hollis a proper name. Sometimes, character descriptions were changed in curious ways that made me wish the archives had more conclusive attributions of when and by whom those decisions were made. Most of the scripts were marked up by Weiner, but character descriptions often did not have the kind of in-depth discussion that lines of dialogue did. What, then, to do with the amendment to Duck Phillips' hairline?

Duck, introduced in "Nixon Vs. Kennedy," is the candidate that Don and Bert hire to replace Roger during his recovery. Duck is kind of an analogue to Roger and Don — he initially appears buttoned-up and different from the reckless culture at Sterling Cooper,[29] but over the course of the seasons we spend with him we realize he has more in common with Roger than one might think. An early draft from July 20, 2007 describes Duck as "early 40s, trim, a nice head of hair."[30] As I mentioned earlier, Roger's first description also calls attention to his hair. This may seem coincidental, but in the notes I took on every single character introduction in the first season there is not another mention of a male character's hair. In the multiple drafts written between July 20 and July 27, the description was changed to "early 40s, trim, balding"[31] — but by July 27, the "balding" descriptor was taken out. In these minute adjustments to his character's physical traits, the episode's writers are grappling with how they want Duck to represent "the new Roger." Again, similar to Roger, the male character's description is fleshed out according to future narratives. Kristen Warner describes the casting process for background actors to be flattening out difference and pushing towards a unified ideal of what the world of the show should look like in order to be "accurate." The same is true for *Mad Men*, even

[29] It is especially interesting that Duck is introduced at the beginning of "Nixon Vs. Kennedy," the episode where the rest of the Sterling Cooper employees are at their hardest-partying, most careless selves.
[30] 1x12 "Nixon vs. Kennedy" Matthew Weiner early draft, undated, Box 10 folder 4, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[31] 1x12 "Nixon vs. Kennedy" Matthew Weiner early draft, undated, Box 10 folder 3, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

before the characters are cast. Characters marked as different, whether by race, class, or gender, are flattened out, their described identities reduced to "types." Male characters are also written allegorically, but gesturing toward longer story arcs.

In other episodes, you can also see the writers adjusting bit characters to be more obvious visual recalls for characters we have already met. In "Marriage of Figaro" we meet several of Don and Betty's neighborhood friends. Betty's friend Francine ("Betty's age, in a short sleeve dress, at least six months pregnant"[32]), introduced the episode prior, comes to Sally's birthday party with her husband, Carlton. Carlton's original description in the April 10 first draft was "Don's age but heavier."[33] By the time of the shooting script, his description was changed to just be "Don's age."[34] The specific alignment of Carlton and Don pays off by the end of the season, when Francine comes to Betty crying about Carlton's infidelity and betrayal. By taking away the reference to Carlton being heavier, onscreen he will look more visually similar to Don — more aligned with the wealthy, slim, attractive ideal that the show takes place within, but also narratively convenient given Don's parallel plotline in this episode.

The midseason episode "Red in the Face" ends with an interrupted meeting between Sterling Cooper and three executives. After Roger got too drunk and flirted with

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[32] 1x02 "Ladies Room" Matthew Weiner shooting script, March 23, 2007, Box 1 folder 4, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[33] 1x03 "Marriage of Figaro" Matthew Weiner first draft, April 10, 2007, Box 2 folder 5, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[34] Ibid.

Betty at dinner at Don's house, Don got his revenge by manipulating Roger into having a boozy lunch with him just before the important meeting. They took the stairs up to Sterling Cooper's offices (since Don paid Hollis to say the elevator was broken), and Roger got increasingly green-faced and out of breath. Upon arriving to the meeting, Roger thoroughly embarrasses himself when he throws up in the lobby, and needs to be walked out of the room by a secretary. The businessmen see it all.

The first draft of the script, dated March 28, describes the characters as "THREE PORTLY BUSINESSMEN, balding and decidedly humorless, carrying serious-looking briefcases."[35] In this draft the scene appears to be written for comedic effect — imagining three overly serious little businessmen watching Roger throw up is funny. But is it funnier, and maybe a bit sadder, to imagine the men as parallel figures to Roger, Don, and Pete themselves?

Two months later and much closer to the episode's shoot dates, the description has changed to "three businessmen," no longer portly, and "they are another version of Pete, Don, and Roger."[36] Roger, in this scene, is obviously painted in an unflattering light, vomiting due to overconsumption in the middle of his workplace. But Don's behavior is also disgraceful in this episode — taking advantage of his friend's vices in order to get back at him for flirting with a wife that Don is barely bothered with in the

[35] 1x07 "Red in the Face" Matthew Weiner first draft, March 28, 2007, Box 5 folder 2, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[36] 1x07 "Red in the Face" Matthew Weiner shooting script, March 28, 2007, Box 5 folder 4, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

first place. Pete is petty and feels emasculated after standing in line with a bunch of middle aged ladies to return a chip and dip bowl during his lunch break, running into an old college friend, and getting his advances rejected by the cute salesgirl. The three businessmen are thus positioned as a reminder of the front these men put up at work — they are "another version" of our primary characters, so to speak.

Mad Men is obsessed with doubling and parallels, which is evident in the descriptions for the characters, from Midge and Betty's "Marilyn and Jackie" to the doubled businessmen. But the doubling divides and reduces the script's women and people of color and multiplies the powerful, central white men. Everywhere you look there is another character who serves as a metaphor for Don or Roger. The collaborative process of drafting these character descriptions also essentially re-drafts Don's own character. He is revised and reframed via his doubles.

The last double of Don I identified in this season is in "Indian Summer," which comes toward the end of the first season. As the episode's title suggests, it is October and still unbearably hot, and Betty is bored and boiling in the house all day. A handsome air conditioner salesman, Bob Shaw, comes to the house, and Betty is immediately drawn to his good looks and attention to her. Bob's character description in the July 24 draft makes him sound a bit like the other man who comes home to their picture-perfect house in Ossining: "30s, handsome, jacket over his shoulder, briefcase at his side."[37] But in earlier drafts, he sounded quite different from Don: "mid-20s, handsome and charming with a

[37] 1x11 "Indian Summer" Matthew Weiner first draft, July 24, 2007, Box 9 folder 3, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

great smile, holding a sample case."[38] I am not sure Don Draper ever smiled in the history of *Mad Men* (or, at least he was never directed to do so in the scripts). In this episode, though, Bob acts as kind of a fantasy figure for Betty. At this point in the season, Don and Betty have been especially distant from one another. But here is a man who notices her discomfort and misery and who listens to her, actively problem-solving to make her life better. Making him look too different from Don would suggest a different fantasy for Betty. At this point in the show, she does not want to escape her marriage from Don and find someone younger and with a "great smile" — she is just imagining a version of Don who actually listens to her and cares about how she is feeling. Weiner and the casting directors picked an actor who bears a passing resemblance to Jon Hamm, but even before the actor was chosen, the allegories were being worked out in the script pages. He was another mirror directing attention toward Don's own narrative arc, working from the background to reinforce the perspective of the show. Warner described the blank whiteness of the *Friday Night Lights* background and bit actors as reinforcing the whiteness of the show itself. Whether a supporting character like Betty or a bit character like Bob Shaw, the character descriptions work toward constructing and maintaining the narrow narrative focus the writers are drafting.

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[38] 1x11 "Indian Summer" Matthew Weiner first draft, July 24, 2007, Box 9 folder 4, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

Despite there being seven or eight drafts of every script in the archives, the bulk of the changes to character descriptions happened with the shooting scripts. I think this trend points toward the specific utility of the character descriptions. The scripts have two functions. In the writers' room they are a place to negotiate allegorical significations for characters and character beats and a place for the writers to build the cultural and ideological world of the show. But they are also blueprints for casting and the "ideal" construction of the characters to which Weiner and the casting directors will compare the actors auditioning for the roles. These are the character descriptions that the actors reading for the parts would see, and would consider in their performances for Weiner and the casting directors. And they, like the dialogue, action descriptions, and everything else represented in the script, are specific instructions for how people are supposed to be represented on screen.

It is this second function that leads into my more detailed discussion of casting in the next chapter. Once the episodes are finished being written and are considered in the next facet of production, the scripts have a different function. The identities of these characters are fixed, and the show expands visually according to the very specific instructions that the character descriptions lay out. My examination of the drafting process shows that historical accuracy was not necessarily a concern at the writing stage of production, at least when it comes to character descriptions. Some lines of dialogue featured notes about the accuracy of slang or colloquial terms, and props and setting were described with careful revision. But the historical accuracy of character descriptions was mostly taken for granted. As I explain in the next chapter, however, when faces and

gestures are put against these blueprints, historical accuracy becomes a major concern. Once they are finished being written and revised, the subjective and creative renderings of these characters are set, a historical record for Weiner and the casting directors to cast toward.

CHAPTER TWO

"Good, Snooty, Meh": *Mad Men*'s Casting Notes as Ideological Battlegrounds

Compared to other aspects of media production, casting is relatively understudied. There is no shortage of work on performance and acting, whether situating performance styles historically or textually analyzing how actors' performances are rendered on screen. But looking at casting frames embodied performance much differently. To examine casting is to acknowledge the indeterminate nature of characters and roles. Dozens, sometimes even hundreds, of actors come in and read for a part. Each auditionee brings his or her own interpretation to the words on the page, and each body represents the role differently. The casting director, along with the producers, episode directors, and writers then compare and evaluate the actors' performances and looks. They bring some of them in again, slowly whittling down the pool to a select few who have the appropriate physicality and talent for a part.

In a way, casting is reminiscent of another key aspect of production: art direction. When building and acquiring sets and costumes, period accuracy is key. With thorough production design, it is possible to visually represent any time period or place on screen. With the right costuming, furniture, and decor, a set becomes a 1960s living room. Production designers create props and costumes with the goal of accurately representing the period, as seen in magazines, popular media texts, and other ephemeral evidence of the time. With a large enough budget and enough careful planning, production designers can approximate their models of the 1960s fairly closely. They can whittle down their

choices and find the perfect patterned chair that might have been in a suburban living room like the Drapers'. With the right props and some cinematic magic, one can translate the written world of the 1960s onscreen.

When it comes to casting, though, things get trickier. People are not props or costumes. They cannot be shaped and sewn by talented designers, built to serve a production purpose, or engineered to look authentically '60s. But the process of casting is as close as you can get to establishing a good and accurate set to work with. The casting notes in the *Mad Men* archives do not specify if there were other production players in the room apart from Weiner and casting directors Laura Schiff and Carrie Audino, but even Weiner's presence for those sessions is telling. He was in those rooms, before every single episode, taking fastidious notes on the performers who were coming in hopeful to be a part of *Mad Men*'s core cast or background. He took careful notes on people auditioning for every role, from crucial ones like Sally Draper to blink-and-you-miss-them parts like Ladies' Room Attendant #2. Casting was critical, since it could be the difference between a schlocky, melodramatic workplace soap and a historically accurate, literary, capital-q-Quality TV series that the writers were aiming to create.

The actors who were chosen for parts on *Mad Men* were usually the ones that were described as being "period-appropriate" (looking like they belonged in the 1960s), attractive, and without any extraneous identity markers that could distract from their readability as the character they are auditioning for. Beauty and perceived class were as important in casting as they were at the writing stage, and shades of white were further developed as Weiner contended with the perceived Jewishness or queerness of some of

the actors auditioning for parts. When considering lead actors, talent and performance nuances played a more central role. Some actors may have won their roles because of the exclamatory "wow!" remarks Weiner left in the margins on the casting notes sheet. But for guest, recurring, and background roles, one can see the tensions of casting for functionality and the ideological ramifications of doing so come to contention.

The casting notes are a snapshot into one critical moment in the preproduction process. The notes are Weiner's off-the-cuff reactions to performers' auditions, handwritten and preserved in the archives, thorns and all. In them, you can see issues of authorial struggles, cultural values, and the ideologies that shape both the production culture of the show and the 1960s setting of *Mad Men*. The notes tell a story different from Kristen J. Warner's ethnographic research on casting. These are Weiner's impressions as the process was happening, the notes he took for himself. I am looking at casting removed from production by 10 years and several thousand miles. But despite my spatial and temporal distance from production, the notes are a specific, intimate look at casting and production ideologies that may not be possible with in-person ethnographic or interviews. It is impossible to know what any of the key players in the production process were thinking and intending with the way they shaped the narrative and world of the show as it was beginning, but these notes get as close to Matthew Weiner's head as a library can approximate.

"A Good Period Face"

In an interview for journalist Brett Martin's book, *Difficult Men*, *Mad Men* staff writer Chris Provenzano details Matthew Weiner's obsession with maintaining historical verisimilitude. "He had fully internalized the movies, the literature, the topical news, the restaurants, the *New Yorker* articles. It was a world inside his head he knew inside and out, like uncorking a vintage wine that had been sitting on the shelf, waiting."[39] Provenzano speaks of Weiner as such a vessel of 1960s information[40] that he almost became a vicious high-powered executive himself.

Throughout his book, Martin examines several of the showrunners of the cable antihero drama genre and draws parallels between them and the ruthless characters they write. But Weiner comes across as the most ruthless. The first-season episode Provenzano was tasked with writing, "The Hobo Code," would feature a flashback scene that Weiner wanted to feel like an entire F. Scott Fitzgerald novel played out in three minutes.[41] If Provenzano did not write a script where at least 20 percent of the original text was good enough to keep in the final draft, Weiner would add his own name onto the writing credits. Though *Difficult Men* does not address casting, these writers' room examples are illustrative of his pre-production perfectionism and his broader behaviors and priorities in the creation of the show.

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[39] Brett Martin, *Difficult Men: Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution: From* The Sopranos *and* The Wire *to* Mad Men *and* Breaking Bad (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 253.

[40] Despite Weiner not actually having lived through the decade himself.

[41] Brett Martin, *Difficult Men: Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution: From* The Sopranos *and* The Wire *to* Mad Men *and* Breaking Bad (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 253.

For the 11 episodes covered in this chapter (the notes for the pilot and "Marriage of Figaro" are missing from the archives), the archives contain 67 pages of audition notes with at least a dozen names logged into each page. Weiner had six different actors read for the part of a waiter who appears in the second episode of the season, and never appears again. Books like *Difficult Men* are very insistent that *Mad Men* was *not* a normal television set; Weiner's abrasive personality and artistic genius set it apart with only two or three other recent, anti-hero driven series as the paragons of the medium. Quality evaluations should always be taken with a grain of salt, but I have found the archives do back up the legend of Weiner being a perfectionist when it comes to casting the most talented and believable actor for a part, and the show's broader concern for historical accuracy played out in interesting ways in the casting sessions.

The first season's audition notes make it clear that Weiner was fastidious about his actors looking like they could be believable 1960s New Yorkers. One of the criteria that he was looking for was a "period face," which he often remarked upon in the margins of the notes for actors who were auditioning. A period face, apparently, is someone who, given the right hair, makeup, and dress, would look at home in the 1960s.[42] On some occasions Weiner includes notes that actors remind him of a midcentury film or television star, but "period face" is more nonspecific. Weiner never explains what he means when he says it. But a "period face" might look odd walking into

[42] I scoured the IMDB profiles of actors who Weiner called "period" and "not period," and I had trouble telling what Weiner meant based on their faces, but perhaps this is why I am not the showrunner of a groundbreaking, critically acclaimed television drama.

her audition in jeans and a t-shirt, like she was almost meant to be wearing a gingham skirt and pink lipstick in the Draper family kitchen.

In "New Amsterdam," the fourth episode of the season, Pete meets two young women at a restaurant. The actresses who were auditioning for "Charlotte/Wendy" on May 10, 2007 auditioned for both parts interchangeably. Charlotte and Wendy only get a few minutes of screen time each — a few lines, one scene. Weiner remarked upon actress Chelsey Crisp's audition that she had a "good period face."[43] Haley Mancini, who also read for Charlotte/Wendy, did not fare so well — she was "adorable and blonde" but "not so period."[44] However, there must have been some redeeming quality of her performance that Weiner did not remark upon, because Mancini ended up getting the role of Wendy — a rare instance of an actor appearing in the episode despite her initial impression of looking too contemporary. Mancini acted alongside Kiersten Lyons as Charlotte, whom Weiner noted as having an "old-fashioned face."[45]

Weiner's notes for bit characters were even more vague than "period face." For actors reading for roles like "Waiter" and "Gaudy Hat" (that is, the smallest of speaking parts), Weiner would often include remarks on their "good face" or "good look." In this context, "good" also speaks to verisimilitude. According to Joseph Turow's research on casting in the 1970s, credibility and visible balance are the main referents for casting a

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[43] 1x04 "New Amsterdam" Matthew Weiner casting session notes, May 10, 2007, Box 3 folder 1, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

role. Credibility is "a caster's perception of what most people think someone in a particular occupation or role looks like," and visible balance is "a caster's perception of how well actors fit next to one another from an aesthetic standpoint."[46] A "good look" means an actor makes sense in both of these contexts — audiences will believe an actor with a certain face and body playing a role, and within the scene, the actor will not look out of context. In conjunction with Warner, I would also argue that race, class, and gender are inseparable from credibility and visible balance. Any mark of difference, put in a context that does not specifically call for it, could be the deciding factor whether an actor is "believable" playing a certain part.

I argue that this rather reductive casting strategy applies most to single-episode guest characters, since it does not take performance into consideration as much as physical appearance. This holds true for the *Mad Men* notes I looked at; the "good faces" were all reading for characters who would appear only in one episode and had names like "Another Waiter" and "Uniformed Black Maid." Two of the actors (Bob Rumnock and David O'Shea) who auditioned for "Waiter #1" in the episode "Ladies Room" earned the note "good face" from Weiner.[47]

While the smallest roles featured evaluations of looks alone, actors who read for recurring roles often featured more substantive performance notes. Alison Brie, the actress who would win the series-long recurring part of Trudy Campbell, was noted as

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[46] Joseph Turow, *Media Industries* (New York: Longman, 1984), 171-2.

[47] 1x02 "Ladies Room" Matthew Weiner casting session notes, April 20, 2007, Box 1 folder 5, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

"good and manic" by Weiner in her May 8, 2007 audition.[48] Brie's audition tape is not included in the archival materials, but judging by her performance in seven seasons of *Mad Men* and work on other TV shows like *Community* (2009-2015) and *GLOW* (2017-), I recognize the frenzied energy that Weiner is talking about. "Good" refers to her talent here. Though Weiner was concerned with the period believability of his actors, it is telling that he did not remark upon any actors auditioning for recurring roles as having a good, old-fashioned period face.

The "period face" so reduces those whom it describes that they are essentially made into props. By evaluating their performance in terms of how their face would be presented onscreen and without much regard for the actual acting in the audition, the notes indicate that Weiner cast the smallest roles in *Mad Men* much like he considered costume and set design. If the background is full of enough pretty 1960s relics, it appears more real.

"NOT EVEN CLOSE"

The audition notes also suggest that Weiner was concerned with old faces of a different variety. In the scripts' character descriptions, character ages are often amended as scripts go through revisions. A husband and wife may be written as 42 and 27 years old in the first draft, then changed to "Don and Betty's age" by the time production begins. For background and guest actors, the ages of the characters are often not specified

[48] 1x04 "New Amsterdam" Matthew Weiner casting session notes, May 8, 2007, Box 3 folder 1, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

at all. It is rather surprising, then, that age appears to be a particular concern of Weiner's when casting parts of any size. Heidi Mokrycki, who auditioned for the season-long recurring role of Helen Bishop (Betty's neighbor and friend in Ossining), is noted by Weiner as looking "not even close to 32."[49] One could argue that Mokrycki would not be credible according to Turow's criteria — "what most people think someone in a particular occupation or role looks like."[50] Perhaps she would also not have visible balance in the scenes with 29-year-old January Jones, and seeing both (despite their divergent ages) as the mothers of five-year-olds might be distracting. But much has been written in the popular press about ageism when it comes to casting actresses in Hollywood. Jennifer Lawrence, while still in her 20s, has been playing mothers and widows for half a decade. It is worth noting that only once during the first season did Weiner indicate that a male actor looked too old to play a part — two of the actors reading for Abraham Menken in "The Long Weekend" were noted as appearing "too old."[51] Like Helen, Mr. Menken was also being cast knowing the age and general look of his children. (Abraham is the father of Rachel Menken, the woman Don has an affair with throughout the first season.) According to the pilot episode scripts, Rachel is supposed to

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[49] 1x02 "Ladies Room" Matthew Weiner casting session notes, April 24, 2007, Box 1 folder 5, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[50] Joseph Turow, *Media Industries* (New York: Longman, 1984), 171.
[51] 1x10 "The Long Weekend" Matthew Weiner casting session notes, June 27, 2007, Box 8 folder 5, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

be in her early 20s[52] — so, as with Helen, it makes sense to cast someone who would not be mistaken for the character's grandfather.

When auditioning for characters who are written as middle aged, industrial double standards around age comes into even sharper relief. In "New Amsterdam," Pete's parents, Dot and Andrew Campbell, are introduced. According to the scripts, the characters are in their early-to-mid-50s, with Dot being "still handsome," though "a little thick around the middle."[53] Christopher Allport, who auditioned for Andrew (and ended up getting the role), was noted by Weiner as having "gray hair" and a "good look,"[54] [55] while Elisabeth Noone, one of the actresses who read for Dot, was "Older? Plastic surgery."[56] Questioning her age provoked Weiner to comment on potential surgeries she had to look younger, while Ralph Meyering, Jr., a would-be Andrew Campbell was "Older? Sleepy"[57] — a note on the energy of his performance. All Mary Linda Phillips had written next to her name was "How old is she?"[58] According to her IMDb profile,

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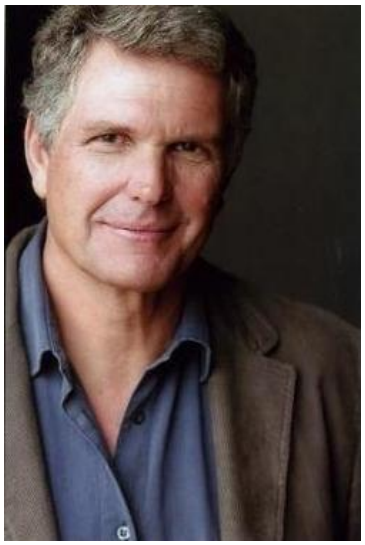
[52] 1x01 "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" Matthew Weiner shooting script, April 18, 2006, Box 1 folder 2, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[53] 1x04 "New Amsterdam" Matthew Weiner shooting script, May 8, 2007, Box 3 folder 2, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[54] 1x04 "New Amsterdam" Matthew Weiner casting session notes, May 8, 2007, Box 3 folder 1, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[55] Pete's father only appeared in one episode, while his mother ended up appearing in six. Christopher Allport died in 2008, and the *Mad Men* writers also killed off Andrew Campbell.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

Phillips was born in 1947, making her 60 years old at the time of her audition. Christopher Allport was also born in 1947.

Barring any dramatic difference in age appearance (and Google Images confirms that both actors look 60-something and roughly the right age to be Vincent Kartheiser's parents), the issue here is not Phillips. It is the broader culture of ageism in Hollywood, which has persisted since early in Hollywood history. In her article "'Must the Players Keep Young?': Early Hollywood's Cult of Youth," Heather Addison includes a quote from a 1928 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*: "There was never really a time in history when age, as age, was paid so little respect. The business world is not exempt from the general trend of the times. Once white hair was respected simply because it was white. Today older men and women in business, as everywhere else, must show specific reasons why they should be respected."[59] Since 1928, it appears the culture has changed a bit. A 60-something, white-haired man has no trouble landing the part of a parent. An older woman, however, must show specific reasons why she should be respected.

[59] Heather Addison, "'Must the Players Keep Young?': Early Hollywood's Cult of Youth," *Cinema Journal* 45, no. 4 (2006): 3-25.

Illustration 1 and 2: Headshots of Christopher Allport and Mary Linda Phillips[60]



"NO CARPETS, PLEASE"

In writing a TV series set in 1960, Weiner also had racial and ethnic factors to consider in relation to Turow's idea of credibility. Though Warner writes that many contemporary television shows adopt colorblind casting practices in order to have more diverse representations of characters (or, within Warner's more skeptical tendencies, to hit upon that diversity buzzword), casting *Mad Men* colorblind would simply not be credible. With interracial marriage more stigmatized and, even in New York, fewer people of color working in high-powered executive careers, whiteness was assumed for any character who was not a service employee. Even within the context of whiteness, though, Weiner paid special attention to actors' racial and ethnic appearance and how it would relate to the version of the 1960s he was writing and constructing. This is a version

[60] From imdb.com.

of the 1960s that foregrounds whiteness and class, but as I explained in the previous chapter, cloaks that focus in allegorical language and de-emphasizes it. It is a *version of* the 1960s that, through all the permutations of writing, casting, and filming, is constructed after the fact as *being like* the 1960s. The ideological implications are pushed further into the background as the production process inches toward the episodes' air dates.

Even at the casting stage you can see *Mad Men*'s construction of whiteness being defined and normalized into the fabric of the show. Jewish identity comes up several times in *Mad Men*'s first season. In the pilot episode, Roger and Don scramble to find a Jewish person who works at Sterling Cooper whom they can use to court Rachel Menken's business. They finally find a Jewish employee (but "had to go all the way to the mailroom!")[61] and strategically place him in the room so that Menken might get the impression that they work with Jewish people all the time. Weiner himself is Jewish. Throughout the first season of the show, characters drop casual bits of anti-Semitism, which Weiner has said in interviews is an intentional nod to the difficulty that minorities of all varieties face in the workplace: "I wanted to express my feeling of being a minority, marginalized on some level because of overrepresentation in cultural aspects of the United States in general."[62] Using Jewish identity as a symbol and keeping with the

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[61] Matthew Weiner, "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," *Mad Men* season 1, episode 1, directed by Alan Taylor, aired July 19, 2007 on AMC, accessed via Netflix U.S.

[62] Matthew Weiner, interview by Anne Cohen, *Forward.com,* March 26, 2015, https://forward.com/schmooze/217360/the-man-behind-the-madness-matthew-weiner/.

casual anti-Semitism that he thought men like Don and Roger would actually express, Weiner cast the show with special attention to actors' perceived religious affiliation.

Out of context, some of the comments next to the actors' names may look unflattering to Weiner, verging on blatantly offensive to the actors. Actors auditioning for parts of all types and sizes, if they appeared Jewish to Weiner, would often just have "Jewy" written next to their names. Bertram Cooper, a seasons-long recurring character who first appears in "Ladies Room," was a part that several high-profile TV, film, and Broadway stars read for. Gavin McLeod, well-known for his starring roles in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *The Love Boat*, was one of the actors who read for Cooper. Weiner's notes on his performance say only "Jewy."[63] Dale, a copywriter and recurring character also introduced in "Ladies Room," was read by seven actors, a few of whom were apparently Jewish-looking. David Greenman, Kurt A. Long, and Dave Shalansky all read for Dale, and all had Stars of David drawn next to their names in the margins. Some were also accompanied by modifiers: "chubby" for Shalansky, "homo" for Greenman.[64] None of these actors ended up winning the role, and Dale ended up being played by Mark Kelly, whose name was not even in the audition logs. From the pilot, where we learn that Sterling Cooper is so lacking in religious diversity that their highest-ranking Jewish employee works in the mailroom, the constructed world of *Mad Men* is a vaguely

[63] 1x02 "Ladies Room" Matthew Weiner casting session notes, April 23, 2007, Box 1 folder 5, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[64] 1x02 "Ladies Room" Matthew Weiner casting session notes, April 18, 2007, Box 1 folder 5, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

Protestant majority. Religion is not something you can read from an actor's face, but the casting notes show Weiner using physical stereotypes to guess at performers' religious and ethnic backgrounds (and choose not to hire them accordingly).

Throughout the first season's casting process, the audition notes show that Weiner was concerned about casting any Jewish actor (or actor that the audience might read as Jewish) in a non-Jewish role. But even when roles *were* explicitly written as Jewish, Weiner expressed hesitation toward hiring actors that appeared too "ethnic." The season's sixth episode, "Babylon," features Don and the Sterling Cooper copywriters accepting a pair of clients representing the Israeli Tourism Ministry, and hoping to rebrand and invite more vacationers to their country. The exact wording describing the characters was subject to several revisions, but at the time they were casting the episode, on May 23, Yoram Ben Shulhai was "deeply tanned, calm as a statue, in a short sleeve shirt and tie."[65] Latino actor Emilio Roso, who read for the role, was noted as being "dark," while Weiner noted Jordanian[66] actor Ammar Daraiseh's "accent?" in addition to his "good look."[67] Perry Wolberg, whose readily available Vimeo acting reel shows him sounding very German, is also noted by Weiner for his accent.[68] Chicago-born actor Richard Steinmetz, the first person Weiner logged as auditioning for Yoram Ben Shulhai, has the

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[65] 1x06 "Babylon" Matthew Weiner shooting script, May 30, 2007, Box 6 folder 3, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[66] According to his IMDB page.
[67] 1x06 "Babylon" Matthew Weiner casting session notes, May 23, 2007, Box 5 folder 5, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[68] Ibid.

following next to his name: "No carpets, please."[69] According to the slang website Urban Dictionary, "carpet" is a derogatory term for people of Arab descent, building off stereotypes of Arab people flying on magic carpets like Aladdin. "Carpet" here also assumes religious affiliation. To Weiner, Steinmetz reads as Arab and possibly Muslim, and therefore not credible as an Israeli-Jewish Sterling Cooper client. Again, none of the actors Weiner marked as connoting the "incorrect" ethnic identity were hired for the role.

In the context of casting, "Jewish" means a stereotyped set of physical attributes and national affiliation. Judging by his notes, Weiner was looking for an actor with an accent to play the client, but not the wrong kind of accent, like Wolberg. He was looking for someone Middle Eastern, but not someone who apparently looked *too* Middle Eastern, like Steinmetz. I am reminded of Stuart Hall's writing on stereotypes, which he defines as "getting hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped, and widely recognized characteristics about a person, reducing everything about the person to those traits, exaggerating and simplifying them and fixing them without change or development to eternity."[70] Like the casting notes themselves, the stereotypes are shorthand, meant to call to mind the collection of traits that the stereotypes bring with them. Warner also recognizes this tendency to stereotype in casting, and calls it "a necessary evil in an

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Stuart Hall, "Contesting a Regime of Representation," *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), 269.

environment where casting/auditioning turnaround is so short and where audience expectations matter."[71]

And the turnaround *is* short. On *Mad Men*, sometimes as many as six or seven actors are booked for the same 15-minute time slot — and although there is no indication in the archives of whether all these actors are auditioning together or separately, sometimes the characters never appear in a scene together, so it is safe to assume that they are reading separately.[72] Weiner may have been frustrated or felt overworked during the sessions. At the end of an April 18 casting session, after a lineup of disappointing[73] would-be Dales, Weiner wrote in large script at the bottom of the audition notes: "KILL MYSELF."

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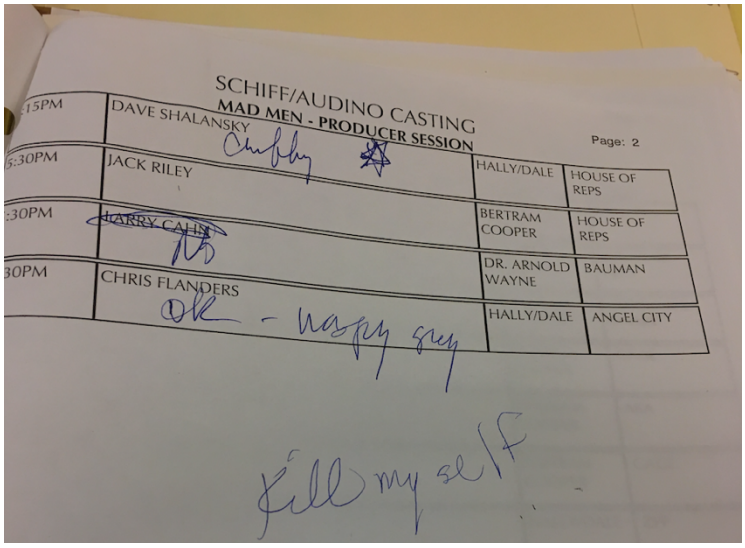
[71] Kristen J. Warner, *The Cultural Politics of Colorblind TV Casting* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 42.

[72] On March 18, 2007, three actors reading for Midge's friend Roy Hazelitt and three actresses reading for Roger's daughter Margaret Sterling were all booked for 3:30 p.m. Weiner evidently saw them all read, because he has handwritten notes by each's name. Roger's daughter and Midge's beatnik friend, tragically, never would share a scene.

[73] See: Weiner's comments on Greenman, Long, and Shalansky.

Illustration 3: Matthew Weiner "KILL MYSELF" annotation from the casting notes[74]



For non-pilot episodes, casting sessions took place just two or three days before the episode would start shooting. A new episode was shot every week during the spring and summer of 2007, and sometimes the casting of small roles for the next episode would be going on during days that other episodes were still shooting. Though there are no logs of his working hours available in the archives, the existence of these daily set binders indicate that Weiner spent nearly every day of production on set. He wrote and directed several episodes himself, and between his responsibilities in the writer's room, director's chair, casting, and the other various hats that showrunners must wear, his days were packed with constant labor. The "kill myself" note was probably meant in jest, since I did not find anything else similar to it in the season one archives. Still, it gestures toward the

[74] 1x02 "Ladies Room" Matthew Weiner casting session notes, April 18, 2007, Box 1 folder 5, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

tedium of the fast-paced production culture of the show — and especially the tedium of casting these small roles. In addition to being a world-building tactic, stereotypes served a specific production goal. Looking at an actor and making an immediate judgment based on their physical type let the casting process move faster.

"WE NEED A GAY"

The expediency of judging books by their covers, however, does not explain Weiner's frequent comments about actors' perceived sexualities. Like religion, sexuality is not something that can be read from a person based on their physical appearance alone. Stereotypes about gestures and expressions might allow a person to make assumptions about another's sexuality, but it is something that many actors do not seek to make apparent about themselves, especially when it may lead to typecasting or limit the roles they are asked to read for.

Weiner's comments about sexuality are odd and off-putting, especially when read alongside his comments to press outlets about wanting to accurately represent the minority experience in Hollywood. *Mad Men* press tours often questioned Weiner on this point, and he often expressed feeling frustrated when his own Jewish identity felt invisible in Hollywood, and people would make anti-Semitic remarks to his face: "I've been in situations where people didn't know I was Jewish. And like Sal [the closeted Sterling Cooper art director who gets fired after a client comes on to him] I had to stand

there while people said horrible things."[75] Still, it is worth examining why Weiner flagged the possible homosexuality of so many of the actors.

I would not have expected so many of the comments about the sexuality of the actors to be noted in child stars' audition files. Child stars, as many people who have watched a movie or television show before know, are often terrible.[76] They are a liability in production due to the limited number of hours they can work, and having child actors on set means cluttering the already-busy production space with tutors, parents, and a crew of stand-ins.[77] Child actors also tend to be hammy performers and rarely fit Turow's definition of visible balance; a child actor often stands out on screen with exaggerated facial expressions and stilted dialogue. Matthew Weiner, who auditioned six actors to play "Waiter #1" in "Ladies Room," also had to sit through dozens of child actor auditions casting that episode. But even in a context of frustration and dissatisfaction with their performances, it is odd that Weiner noted two of the boys auditioning for the part of Glen Bishop (Joseph Castanon and Tanner Blaze) as being, respectively, a "queen" and "phony gay."[78]

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[75] Matthew Weiner, interview by Anne Cohen, *Forward.com,* March 26, 2015, https://forward.com/schmooze/217360/the-man-behind-the-madness-matthew-weiner/.

[76] Mason Vale Cotton, who would be the fourth child to play Bobby Draper, came to *Mad Men* after a long run playing Teri Hatcher's son on ABC's *Desperate Housewives,* where he once exclaimed, "Boy, the stuff I do for macaroons!"

[77] *Mad Men*, like many other film and television productions, used adult little people as stand-ins for scenes with children, so that the children could only be on set when they were actually acting.

[78] 1x02 "Ladies Room" Matthew Weiner casting session notes, April 24, 2007, Box 1 folder 5, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

"Phony" comes up a lot in the children's auditions, which tracks with Weiner's and the show's preoccupation with verisimilitude and accuracy. It is unsurprising that none of the children marked as "fake" or bad actors ended up getting cast. But the child who ended up getting the role of Glen — and who auditioned alongside eight other children for the part — was Marten Holden Weiner, Matthew Weiner's son. None of the actors auditioning for Bobby Draper or Ernie Hanson, the other two roles for young boys, were called out on their perceived homosexuality. I do not have access to the audition tapes, so I hesitate to make any grand claims here. Perhaps none of the Bobbys and Ernies gave that stereotyped impression in their audition, or perhaps something about the sides the Glens were reading from brought that out of their performance. However, the notes take on a different context when you consider that Weiner was calling the boys who auditioned against his kid gay.[79] As he is calling out the children competing with his son, it is impossible to separate Weiner the showrunner from Weiner the father. He does not include any notes on his son's performance in his own audition. Though other boys auditioned for Glen, there was only ever going to be one considered for the part.

It might be interesting to compare how Weiner cast a role like Glen (who is a child and not a gay adult man) with Salvatore Romano, the recurring character and art director whom Weiner apparently wrote as a symbol for the insidious homophobia and prejudice of the 1960s. However, since Sal was introduced in the pilot and the audition notes for that episode are missing, I will instead look at the one-episode guest part of

[79] Marten Holden Weiner's name is annotated with only a check mark, and a correction to the spelling of whatever office assistant made a mistake and spelled his name "Martin."

Elliot. Elliot, introduced in "The Hobo Code," is a client of Sterling Cooper's who takes an interest to Sal. Up until this episode, it had been heavily foreshadowed that Sal was gay, though we only ever saw him at work and never in any romantic situation with a man. But in "The Hobo Code," Sal and Elliot hit it off and end up getting drinks together after work. When Elliot flirts and tries to make a subtle move on Sal, Sal panics and shuts him down.[80]

According to the episode's audition notes, Weiner had five men read for the part of Elliot. More than performance or a "good look," Weiner seems to be concerned with casting an actor who immediately reads as gay. So much of Sal's storyline in this episode is dependent upon his chemistry with Elliot and their unspoken acknowledgment of each other. Elliot is also written as being more confident in his sexuality than Sal, so an actor who reads as aggressively straight would not work. One of the actors who read for Elliot, Misha Collins, was unsatisfactory in this regard — Weiner called him "dull" and wrote that "we need a gay."[81] While Weiner did not read Collins as gay, shortly after reading for this one-episode guest role, Collins would win the part of the angel Castiel on the CW's cult hit *Supernatural* (2007–), a show he would be on for 10 seasons and counting. There are millions of entries for "slash" (male/male) fanfiction for Castiel and his

[80] Chris Provenzano, "The Hobo Code," *Mad Men* season 1, episode 8, directed by Phil Abraham, aired September 6, 2007 on AMC, accessed via Netflix U.S.
[81] 1x08 "The Hobo Code" Matthew Weiner casting session notes, July 10, 2007, Box 6 folder 4, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

Supernatural co-leads, so there are evidently plenty of viewers and fans who would believe Collins capable of playing a gay character.

However, in the notes, there appears to be a fine line between an actor's believability as gay and being *too* gay to play the part of Elliot. Zak Barnett, who also auditioned for Elliot, had the word "faggot" written next to his name — though Weiner scribbled the slur out and replaced it with a milder "eh."[82] Perhaps Barnett's portrayal of Elliot's confidence was too contemporary, or the visible balance between how audiences might read him as gay and Sal as gay was too significant. But Barnett did not get the part, and even though Weiner crossed out his use of the offensive slur, it still stands next to the rest of the notes, the "gay" Glen Bishops and the "homo" performances by Dale hopefuls.

***

It would be easy to read the audition notes, with all their harsh language and blatant stereotyping, as a reflection on Weiner's character or personal beliefs. But situating the casting notes within the production culture of the show is even more interesting. Weiner's focus on historical accuracy and verisimilitude extended past the writer's room and into all aspects of production, including casting. In looking at people as flattened images, whether that be a collection of facial features that make up a "period face" or stereotypes in terms of race and sexuality, the casting notes indicate that Weiner did look at these recurring, guest, and background characters almost like props. They were images to be read on the screen, and casting decisions were made more on their

[82] Ibid.

appearance and relation to 1960s culture and ideology than the contours of their individual performances.

But it is important to remember that "the 1960s" in *Mad Men* are not the 1960s of the historical record. The world of the show is a fictionalized space created for narrative possibility and constructed with certain stories already in mind. But through the production process, from writing to casting to the actual airing of these episodes, the constructedness of this world is increasingly obscured, and increasingly retrofitted to center Weiner as the author-god at the head of it all. "The 1960s," created by the collective of writers, is flattened just like the actors in the background, reduced to an image and attributed to Matthew Weiner's singular creative genius.

CHAPTER THREE

"Where the Truth Lies": *Mad Men's* Press Kits and Post-Production Construction of Quality

As I have argued in previous chapters, Weiner and the writers' preeminent concern while drafting and casting the first season was verisimilitude to the "real" 1960s. The "legitimate" 1960s were one of the ways *Mad Men* achieved cultural legitimacy, or alignment with the "quality" paradigm that predominated in 2007. *Legitimating Television* was published in 2012, and with a bit of historical distance, it is evident that Newman and Levine's examples were describing a genre and a moment for TV rather than the state of the industry as a whole. Television, streaming, and digital content have continued to develop in different ways since then, and it is increasingly difficult (especially with little historical distance) to decipher which shows are influential parts of the cultural zeitgeist when there are more scripted original series on the air today than ever before. To begin with, the idea of a having a television canon seems reductive — although it is worth noting that *Mad Men*, that (now) relatively old guard of quality TV, is in the Harry Ransom Center archives and something like *Riverdale* (2017–) will likely never make it there.

"Quality," as a historical buzzword, circa the 2000s was aligned with complex, serialized storytelling and fearlessness when it comes to telling dark and morally ambiguous stories. It was also, in this historical moment, absolutely crucial to designate a key authorial figurehead — the showrunner. From writing to casting, Weiner's role as author-god had gained more traction as the other production players mentioned in the

archives were whittled down. From the collective writers' room to Weiner, Schiff, and Audino in the casting room, by the time *Mad Men* was being promoted to journalists — and, later, Emmy voters — *Mad Men* was fully hitched to Weiner's star wagon. He had created this world through writing, casting, and other pre-production and production moments, and by this point, the labor and crucial roles that actors, casting directors, and other writers played was being buried in favor of highlighting Weiner. The fact that *Mad Men* was *not* the "real" 1960s was also further and further obscured as the promotional texts fawned over the true-to-life props and complex writing attributed to Weiner's creative vision.

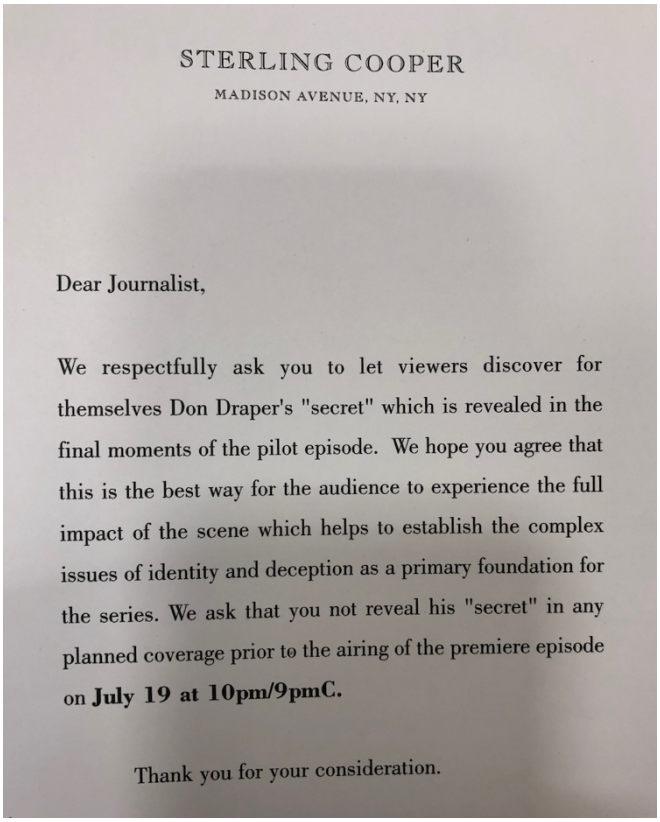
In this chapter, I examine the promotional paratexts included with the *Mad Men* archival materials — booklets sent out to journalists prior to the pilot episode's airing and the For Your Consideration mailers sent to Emmy voters prior to the 2008 award season. These paratexts situate the show's articulation of quality and legitimation at two key moments: the review, or critical/audience consensus of quality, and the Emmy award function as similar barometers of quality within industrial and critical circles. As Newman and Levine note, it was especially important that *The Shield* won Emmys in its first season, as that is part of what cemented the show as the forefather of "quality" cable TV during that decade. These particular paratexts are also especially interesting given that they were produced by AMC's marketing departments for extremely narrow audiences — for the press kits, critics, and for the FYC booklets, Emmy voters. These documents helped construct the show's vision of quality at the specific industrial levels where quality was being constructed.

These informational booklets contain enlightening glances at the network's initial marketing strategy for the show and its promotion of the stars who acted in it — and Weiner, the star who made it. The show can be written, cast, and shot with an eye toward faithfully representing the 1960s and maintaining a contemporary notion of "quality," but the construction of quality ultimately rests upon the attitudes of critic and industrial circles, and is not inherently within the text itself. Quality is made and articulated in these paratexts, again through emphasizing (and exaggerating) the show's historical verisimilitude and Weiner's authorial centrality in rendering it.

DEAR JOURNALIST

Upon opening the immaculately bound *Mad Men* press kit booklet, you see one loose sheet of paper tucked into the first page. The note is printed on Sterling Cooper letterpress, with an elegant 1960s-looking font. The note speaks directly to the journalist who just opened this box, and winkingly asks them not to divulge Don's "secret" in their pre-air reviews. The booklet does not mention what this "secret" may be — the pilot ends with the introduction of Betty, Don's wife, which is a bit of a surprise, but January Jones was present in a variety of the show's promotional materials and her involvement with *Mad Men* was no secret. I believe the booklet is referring to Don's double identity, revealed later in the season, but the fact that the booklet is so vague about the secret only makes it more intriguing:

Illustration 4: Note “from the desk of Sterling Cooper” from season one press kit[83]



STERLING COOPER

MADISON AVENUE, NY, NY

Dear Journalist,

We respectfully ask you to let viewers discover for themselves Don Draper's "secret" which is revealed in the final moments of the pilot episode. We hope you agree that this is the best way for the audience to experience the full impact of the scene which helps to establish the complex issues of identity and deception as a primary foundation for the series. We ask that you not reveal his "secret" in any planned coverage prior to the airing of the premiere episode on **July 19 at 10pm/9pmC.**

Thank you for your consideration.

This piece of loose paper is stuck into the first page of the booklet before you get a chance to see what is inside the rest of it. But immediately, the journalist opening this box can glean some information about *Mad Men*. It is the kind of show with scenes that have “impact,” and not just for the shock value of their plot developments, but because of their thematic resonance. The note also nods toward the rest of the series — this is just a pilot, but the rest of the season (series, even) is imagined and invoked here. There is a

[83] *Mad Men* press kits and publicity brochures season one, press kit with booklet and white dress shirt, July 2007, osb 21, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

plan, and the person writing this note knows where the show is going. The letter is unsigned, but the combination of the Sterling Cooper letterhead and the collective "we" referred to in the letter make it more unclear who is the person supposedly sticking this note in the press kit. An AMC executive? Matthew Weiner? Don Draper himself? The effect is intriguing. The "we," though, sounds like it refers to the person who wrote the episode or had some creative control over it. The reason "we" do not want the journalist to spoil Don's secret is because of the plot point's exigency to the *story*, and this request is framed like an artist being protective of his or her work. But the fact that this note, potentially framed as being a note from Weiner, is printed on Sterling Cooper letterhead is also important. This note aligns Weiner and Don as similar creative figureheads. The paper sleeve with the DVD screeners is nestled under the booklet, so the journalist opening this book has likely not seen the episode before he or she reads this note. Even before the journalist opens up the rest of the press kit, this note positions Don and Weiner as *Mad Men*'s twin enigmatic genius stars.

The first page of the booklet proper features another letter, this time "from the desk of Matthew Weiner." This note describes Weiner's inspiration for the show and his fascination with the 1960s. Though Weiner himself was born in 1965 and was not alive during the last gasp of the Eisenhower years, he nonetheless constructs himself as an expert on the decade. In *Legitimating Television*, Newman and Levine write about *Sopranos* showrunner David Chase's discussion with the press about how that show is very much informed by his own Italian-American identity, and Livia Soprano is based on

his own mother.[84] The links to the author's past and his firsthand research or experience lends legitimacy to the work he has created. Weiner's letter in the press kit does similar discursive work. He writes about being obsessed with *The Catcher in the Rye*[85] from a young age, and seeing *The Apartment* (1960) for the first time and having its ideologies really speak to him: "An America with the swagger of success that was still very insecure at its core. The men seemed let out of a cage, having survived combat, and the women were figuring out whether they should oblige or go their own way."[86] Here, Weiner explicitly defines the 1960 that he is imagining through *Mad Men*. Gender is central here, as it is in the show's narratives. The men have more agency than ever before ("let out of a cage") and the women are stuck and hesitant. Weiner is framing the show as an allegory about gender. If his reference to *The Catcher in the Rye* is any indication, his own creative relationship with history is quite loose, and more metaphorical than historically bound — despite the fact that the paratexts frame him as all-knowing god-brain of 1960.

Weiner summarizes what, in his research, he has gleaned about the mindset and morals of the version of the 1960s he is writing about. But he also includes a reminder that although the show is set in 1960, the stories and character archetypes still resonate

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[84] Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine, *Legitimating Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status* (London: Routledge, 2011), 50.

[85] *The Catcher In the Rye* was published in 1951 and is set in suburban California, a very different era and location from *Mad Men*. I am not sure what Weiner was trying to do by name-dropping a text that has barely anything in common with his own show — especially alongside *The Apartment*, which is much more thematically similar to *Mad Men*.

[86] *Mad Men* press kits and publicity brochures season one, press kit with booklet and white dress shirt, July 2007, osb 21, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

with viewers' contemporary context: "Although we've aged 50 years as a country, we still struggle with the same issues we always have. And not just racism and sexism. We struggle with our fidelity, our ambition, and probably most of all, our identity. We've learned to mask these issues through language and slightly better behavior, but we still feel them. They don't go away."[87] This statement almost seems contradictory to the production-wide concern with historical verisimilitude and the specific pains taken to represent the ideologies and culture of the 1960s visually. If part of the appeal of the show is that it is so specifically set in 1960, does it matter if the themes are universal and timeless? The letter from Weiner to journalists essentially serves the purpose of arguing to journalists that the version of 1960 presented in the show is *the* 1960, and that Weiner is a trustworthy source for 1960s trivia and a great writer. This assertion that ultimately the show is *not* about the 1960s and the story *is* more timeless, however, gestures at the truth. *Mad Men* is a fictionalized, imagined, allegorical version of the 1960s. It is a television show with a narrow perspective, not a panorama of history come to life.

"They don't go away" — that line also hints toward the timelessness that this letter is working to ascribe to *Mad Men,* in tandem with the rest of the booklet. Weiner closes his letter by reminding the reader of his career trajectory, or to use the high art phrase Newman and Levine do, Weiner's "oeuvre." The note mentions Weiner's work on *The Sopranos* and how the *Mad Men* pilot was instrumental in getting him his "big break" in writing. Perhaps it is my perspective looking back 11 years after it was written,

[87] Ibid.

but the note almost reads like a keepsake, like it is meant to be a piece of history. It especially has this effect when read as a part of the *Mad Men* archive, in one of just a few television archives at any U.S. university. This is Matthew Weiner recounting his past and hinting toward the future of a show he imagines will be immense and historic — he writes about *Mad Men* in relation to real history, and as a potential part of TV history. *Legitimating Television* mentions that Weiner gave a lot of print and video interviews during *Mad Men*, "functioning as the television equivalent of a novelist or cineaste,"[88] but I would argue that the press kit positions his attachment to the show as more star-like than anything. His name is signed at the bottom — standard for a letter, but alongside the practiced signatures in his script for "The Wheel," it reads more like an autograph.

In addition to highlighting its purported historical accuracy and the talent of the showrunner, the booklet's descriptions advertise *Mad Men*'s provocative content. The booklet features quotes from the show scattered throughout, next to glossy production still photographs and at the top of the informational pages. On the page detailing the show's premise, setting, and "creator," there is one quote from Don to Pete: "I bet the world looks like one great big brassiere strap just waiting to be snapped."[89] Just under the quote is the following description of the show's premise: "The series depicts the sexual exploits and social mores of this most innovative yet ruthless profession while taking an

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[88] Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine, *Legitimating Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status* (London: Routledge, 2011), 50.

[89] *Mad Men* press kits and publicity brochures season one, press kit with booklet and white dress shirt, July 2007, osb 21, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

unflinching look at the ad men who shaped the hopes and dreams of Americans on a daily basis."[90] Of course, a one-sentence logline cannot contain the nuance of an entire TV show, but the way the show is summed up here is interesting, and quite divergent from what the show's narrative actually suggests.

The "sexual exploits" are actually not sexy at all within their contexts — Don is sleeping with Midge and Rachel because he feels trapped with Betty, and he does not know who he is unless he has secrets to keep and reasons to hide. This of course changes by the end of the show, but during the first season Joan and Roger are portrayed as being a hopeless and doomed couple. The power dynamics between Pete and Peggy are anything but sexy. Other characters like Harry and Hildy have one-night stands, but they are portrayed as more pathetic than titillating — Harry loses his glasses and is wracked with guilt thinking of his wife at home. And, of course, compared with a show like *The Sopranos,* which had pay-cable standards for nudity and language, AMC and *Mad Men* as a basic cable program could not depict as much explicit language or nudity. Through all the assertions that this show is edgy, dark, and sexual, the booklet is working to quash any anxieties about the show being a squeaky-clean representation of a squeaky-clean decade. Despite the fact that *Mad Men* takes place mainly in city offices and suburban homes and Don Draper is not a hyper-violent crime boss or corrupt cop, the logline is still trying to align *Mad Men* with these earlier examples of "quality TV." Language like "unflinching," "ruthless," and "the hopes and dreams of Americans" could just as easily

[90] Ibid.

describe *The Sopranos* or *The Shield*. With its logline, *Mad Men* nods to its edgy older brothers in this generation of "quality TV."

There is a requisite section detailing Weiner's accomplishments in addition to the personal letter at the beginning of the pamphlet, reiterating his writing credits on *The Sopranos,* this time mentioning his Emmy award nominations for that program.[91] The pamphlet is so unclear as to what Weiner earned the Emmys are for that, upon my first few reads of the pages, I had assumed that Weiner won the awards for solo writing credits, when in reality Weiner began *Mad Men* with no Emmy wins of his own.[92] Since awards consideration is, for many journalists and audience members alike, a barometer of quality, it makes sense for the pamphlet to bring up whatever tenuous connection to Emmy wins that the talent behind the show already has won. But recurring actor Robert Morse had won multiple Emmy and Tony awards, and the pamphlet barely mentions that fact. Here, again, Weiner overtakes the spotlight from the other voices that contributed to the production process, whether writers or performers. The paratexts construct *Mad Men* as being Weiner's show, using authorial vision and intent as a vehicle for quality.

Weiner is quoted in his own description, again describing the timelessness of the characters he created: "I believe these characters will really resonate with viewers — whether they are calculating how to move up the corporate ladder without being noticed

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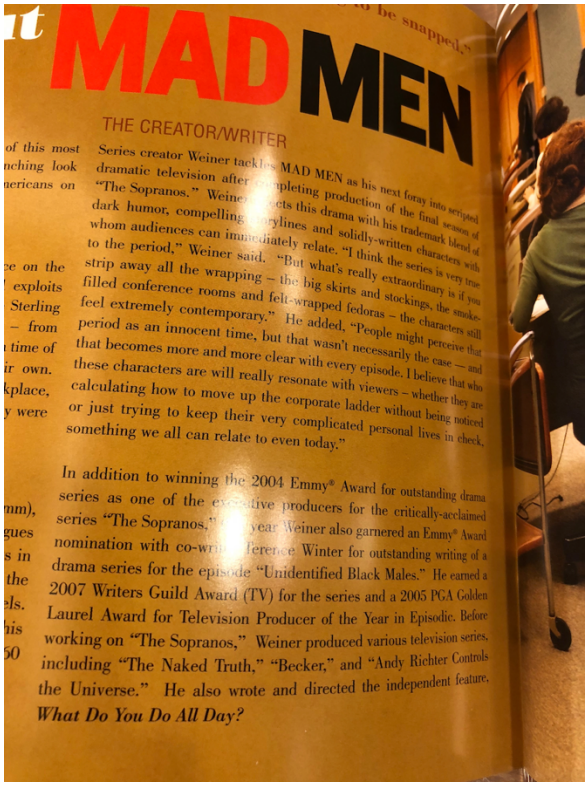
[91] Weiner was nominated for two writing Emmys for his work on *The Sopranos*: for co-writing the season five's "Unidentified Black Males" with Terence Winter in 2004 and co-writing season six's "Kennedy and Heidi" with David Chase in 2007.
[92] In 2004, Terence Winter won an Emmy for the *Sopranos* episode he wrote solo, "Long Term Parking." In 2007, David Chase won for his solo episode "Members Only."

or just trying to keep their very complicated personal lives in check, something we all can relate to even today."[93] The section about Weiner is quite long, especially in comparison to the other producers and key players who developed the show:

Illustration 5: Informational pages about the producers, Lionsgate, AMC, and the creator/writer from the season one press kit[94]

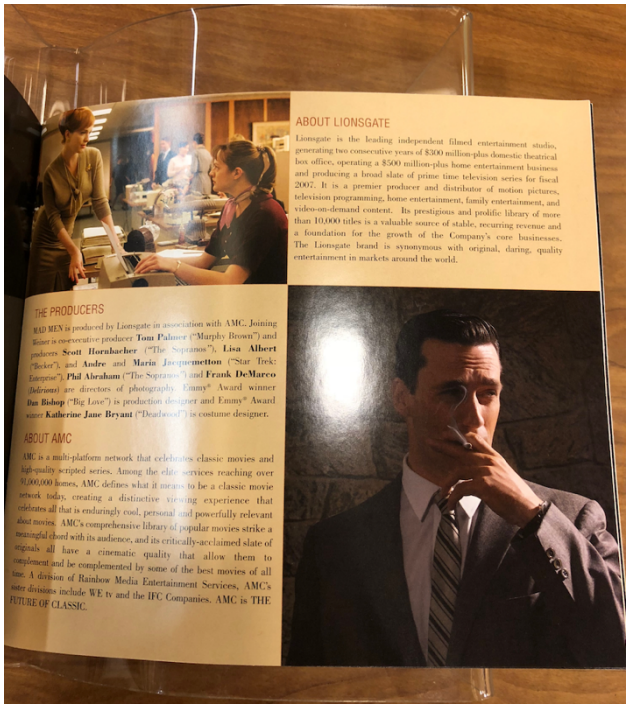


MAD MEN

THE CREATOR/WRITER

Series creator Weiner tackles MAD MEN as his next foray into scripted dramatic television after completing production of the final season of "The Sopranos." Weiner projects this drama with his trademark blend of dark humor, compelling storylines and solidly-written characters with whom audiences can immediately relate. "I think the series is very true to the period," Weiner said. "But what's really extraordinary is if you strip away all the wrapping – the big skirts and stockings, the smoke-filled conference rooms and felt-wrapped fedoras – the characters still feel extremely contemporary." He added, "People might perceive that period as an innocent time, but that wasn't necessarily the case – and that becomes more and more clear with every episode. I believe that who these characters are will really resonate with viewers – whether they are calculating how to move up the corporate ladder without being noticed or just trying to keep their very complicated personal lives in check, something we all can relate to even today."

In addition to winning the 2004 Emmy® Award for outstanding drama series as one of the executive producers for the critically-acclaimed series "The Sopranos," that year Weiner also garnered an Emmy® Award nomination with co-writer Terence Winter for outstanding writing of a drama series for the episode "Unidentified Black Males." He earned a 2007 Writers Guild Award (TV) for the series and a 2005 PGA Golden Laurel Award for Television Producer of the Year in Episodic. Before working on "The Sopranos," Weiner produced various television series, including "The Naked Truth," "Becker," and "Andy Richter Controls the Universe." He also wrote and directed the independent feature, *What Do You Do All Day?*



ABOUT LIONSGATE

Lionsgate is the leading independent filmed entertainment studio, generating two consecutive years of $300 million-plus domestic theatrical box office, operating a $500 million-plus home entertainment business and producing a broad slate of prime time television series for fiscal 2007. It is a premier producer and distributor of motion pictures, television programming, home entertainment, family entertainment, and video-on-demand content. Its prestigious and prolific library of more than 10,000 titles is a valuable source of stable, recurring revenue and a foundation for the growth of the Company's core businesses. The Lionsgate brand is synonymous with original, daring, quality entertainment in markets around the world.

THE PRODUCERS

MAD MEN is produced by Lionsgate in association with AMC. Joining Weiner is co-executive producer **Tom Palmer** ("Murphy Brown") and producers **Scott Hornbacher** ("The Sopranos"), **Lisa Albert** ("Becker"), and **Andre** and **Maria Jacquemetton** ("Star Trek: Enterprise"). **Phil Abraham** ("The Sopranos") and **Frank DeMarco** (*Believers*) are directors of photography. Emmy® Award winner **Dan Bishop** ("Big Love") is production designer and Emmy® Award winner **Katherine Jane Bryant** ("Deadwood") is costume designer.

ABOUT AMC

AMC is a multi-platform network that celebrates classic movies and high-quality scripted series. Among the elite services reaching over 30,000,000 homes, AMC defines what it means to be a classic movie network today, creating a distinctive viewing experience that celebrates all that is enduringly cool, personal and powerfully relevant about movies. AMC's comprehensive library of popular movies strike a meaningful chord with its audiences, and its critically-acclaimed slate of originals all have a cinematic quality that allow them to complement and be complemented by some of the best movies of all time. A division of Rainbow Media Entertainment Services, AMC's sister divisions include WE tv and the IFC Companies. AMC is THE FUTURE OF CLASSIC.

[93] *Mad Men* press kits and publicity brochures season one, press kit with booklet and white dress shirt, July 2007, osb 21, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.
[94] Ibid.

The above-the-line main cast of actors and entire staff of writers also get blurbs in the booklet, but they appear a few pages later, and not positioned on the page next to the show's logline and setting. But if the pamphlet is selling Weiner as the main star attached to *Mad Men*, how do the descriptions of the *actors* figure into the press kit's marketing strategy?

First, the headline on their page in the press kit advertise them as "the actors and actresses," compared with Weiner and the show's summary being placed on the page headlined "about *Mad Men*." In the individual actor descriptions, their previous television experiences are highlighted, because for most of the main and supporting actors, small television roles were the only acting experience they had before 2007. About Jon Hamm, the booklet says, "Hamm landed his first big role in the NBC series *Providence* (1999-2002) where a cameo performance turned into an 18-episode run."[95] Although at this point Hamm was far from a household name, this line signals his talent — he was so impressive on *Providence* that he got written into that show. Elisabeth Moss and Vincent Kartheiser are noted for their supporting roles in *The West Wing* (1999-2006) and *Angel* (1999-2004), respectively. All of the recurring characters, from Betty to Sal, are allotted a paragraph of description for their past work, which for many of them is mainly in television, and mainly in guest arcs. Like Hamm and his role on *Providence*, their lack of starring experience is constructed as something positive. These actors are undiscovered talent, and viewers of *Mad Men* will be treated to watching that talent emerge and be discovered.

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[95] Ibid.

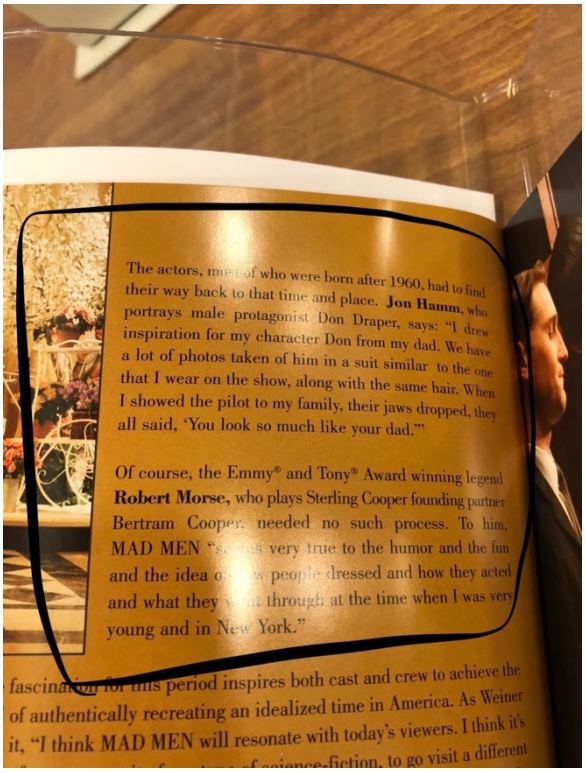
Robert Morse, who plays Bert Cooper, is given the longest description, which is not surprising considering his many decades of high-profile work on screen and stage. Prior to *Mad Men*, Morse was the only actor in the cast to have received an Emmy award (for his performance in the PBS miniseries *Tru* [1992]). Morse's blurb also lists his accomplishments on Broadway and situates them for those journalists who may not be as familiar with Broadway history as television history: "Robert Morse is one of only four actors in the history of the Tony Awards to have received both of its top honors — Best Actor in a Play and Best Actor in a Musical — a distinction he shares only with Rex Harrison, Christopher Plummer, and Zero Mostel."[96] As opposed to the depersonalized list of credits the other actors receive, the blurb on Morse positions him as a genuine star — and the renown he gained for his performance in the musical *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (1961) harkens back to the *Mad Men* era.

Later in the booklet, in an extended section about the show's representation of its 1960s setting, Morse is interviewed as a sort of 1960s expert. Does the show come close to faithfully representing the 1960s that he lived through? Morse responds that *Mad Men* "seems very true to the humor and the fun and the idea of how people dressed and how they acted and what they went through at the time that I was very young and in New York."[97] Weiner was quoted earlier in the booklet saying that most of the people who worked on the show were not alive (or, at least, not adults) during the 1960s, so he had to step back and consult his research and the people who were alive then to make sure that

[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.

they were representing the decade faithfully. But, of course, Weiner could not talk to every person who was alive during the 1960s, and through his limited selection process, engaged with just a few of the unique perspectives that people had on this decade. What is "faithful" to some may be completely unrepresentative to others' experiences, but the pamphlet does not acknowledge the complexities of representing history. Instead, here is Robert Morse, in print, asserting to the journalist that the show is an accurate reflection of the monolithic 1960s.

Illustration 6: Quote from Robert Morris about historical accuracy from the season one press kit[98]


The actors, most of who were born after 1960, had to find their way back to that time and place. **Jon Hamm**, who portrays male protagonist Don Draper, says: "I drew inspiration for my character Don from my dad. We have a lot of photos taken of him in a suit similar to the one that I wear on the show, along with the same hair. When I showed the pilot to my family, their jaws dropped, they all said, 'You look so much like your dad.'"

Of course, the Emmy® and Tony® Award winning legend **Robert Morse,** who plays Sterling Cooper founding partner Bertram Cooper, needed no such process. To him, MAD MEN "[illegible] very true to the humor and the fun and the idea of how people dressed and how they acted and what they [illegible] through at the time when I was very young and in New York."

fascination for this period inspires both cast and crew to achieve the of authentically recreating an idealized time in America. As Weiner it, "I think MAD MEN will resonate with today's viewers. I think it's [illegible] of science-fiction, to go visit a different

[98] Ibid. (black box not in original)

As seen through the content of the press kit, *Mad Men*'s pre-air promotion emphasized the show's verisimilitude to the 1960s on multiple fronts — Matthew Weiner, the showrunner-auteur, had always been fascinated by the '60s, and supplemented his interest with historical research on period politics, fashion, and popular culture. Though the actors themselves were not highlighted throughout the booklet as much as Weiner was, the presence of 1960s icons like Robert Morse lent additional prestige to the show's cast of mostly unknowns. The booklet sparked intrigue with notes addressed to the journalist and from Weiner himself. Even the physical aesthetics of the press kit — the glossy color photographs, the significant weight of the booklet itself — gave an impression of high quality. A lot of the press kits that end up on journalists' desks are the equivalent of junk mail — DVD screeners meant to be discarded after the show premieres and cheaply made, scratchy t-shirts. *Mad Men*'s press kit is a physical representation of the quality that the show was meant to project to journalists and potential viewers.

WHAT MORE PROOF DO YOU NEED?

Also included in the HRC's box of press kit materials was a For Your Consideration mailer sent to Academy of Television Arts & Sciences voters in the summer of 2008 to promote *Mad Men*'s submissions for nomination. The Emmy Awards are not the end-all-be-all of television prestige — even before "peak TV" and the advent of streaming television there were a lot of shows on TV, and voters' conceptions of quality did not always line up exactly with what would be part of "the television canon,"

or even what were the best shows in a certain year. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *The Wire* (2002-2008) are considered classic television series today, beloved by critics, fans, and academics, but they were never awarded any Emmys. The Emmys also tend to get stuck rewarding the same shows and people every year, with seemingly little evaluation of shifts in quality from season to season.[99] And, of course, awards are always political. With the Emmys especially, For Your Consideration ads in print and in mailers like these are often the difference between a nomination and a snub. The mailers, especially, are speaking to a very specific audience. If not for their preservation in the archives, I would never have had access to these materials, since they were sent out to a specific list of Television Academy voters.

The mailer that I looked at in the HRC was promoting both *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad*. Both shows aired their first seasons in the 2007-2008 television season, and both were edgy, antihero driven dramas with a well-known showrunner at the helm. (For *Breaking Bad*, this was standout *X-Files* writer Vince Gilligan.) The dual mailer is a rich image to behold. *Breaking Bad* and *Mad Men* are both descendants of *The Sopranos* and its ilk of morally complex dramas, but borrow different aspects from this type of show. Where *Mad Men* is more serialized and less action-driven, the first season of *Breaking Bad* is sensationally violent, with much more episodic stories. They have relatively little in common, apart from both airing on AMC and both vying for nominations in the same (dramatic series) categories. Theoretically, putting their only

[99] Many critics and fans thought the most recent season of *Veep* (2012–) was the show's weakest so far, but it has won Outstanding Comedy Series every year since 2015.

two show submissions against each other would split votes and be more likely to lead AMC to lose. But by including both shows together instead of pitching for one (or each, individually), AMC's strategy here suggests that they are not sure which show might be their big breakout. There was no harm in promoting both together and seeing what would stick.

The booklets for each TV show are in a gray cardboard sleeve that resembled two vinyl record sleeves stuck together — you can open each side of the dual sleeve and pull out the corresponding booklet. On the inside of the folded cardboard sleeve there is a quote from *Rolling Stone* magazine advertising the superior quality of AMC's dramas:

Illustration 7: Booklet sleeves and packaging from the Emmy For Your Consideration kit[100]

[100] *Mad Men* press kits and publicity brochures season one, press kit with booklet and white dress shirt, July 2007, osb 21, *Mad Men* production papers 2007-2015, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas libraries.

In punchy metallic silver, the mailer is announcing that the comparison between *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad* is more than just a surface reading of their dynamic supporting casts and enigmatic male leads. As AMC series, they are both presented as edgy, complex, well-written, and sexy, despite their lack of actual narrative similarity. For the 2008 Emmys, both shows had submitted their first seasons — though *Mad Men* aired in 2007, the early summer submission cutoff meant that it had to wait almost a full year for Emmy consideration. The booklets for each show are designed similarly, and analogous quotes from trade presses, city dailies, and magazines like *Rolling Stone* fill their pages. Since this thesis is about *Mad Men*, I will use examples from that show, but the booklet for *Breaking Bad* looks remarkably similar, give or take a few specific words of praise. You could probably substitute *Breaking Bad* and *Mad Men* for any other two quality television shows, given the cookie cutter nature of this mailer. I would imagine a Showtime mailer for *Weeds* (2005-2012) and *Dexter* (2006-2013) would look essentially the same. At this point in the production process — that is, after the show has aired and the reviews have been published — the construction and marketing of quality appears to be more fill-in-the-blank than anything.

Similar to the press kit, the page containing a summary of the show emphasizes Weiner's involvement and the glamorous, intriguing world of 1960s corporate New York. But this page also mentions the other awards that *Mad Men* was nominated for and won between the show's airing and Emmy promotion season — a Peabody Award, DGA Award, WGA Award, Art Director's Guild Award, and the Golden Globe for Best TV

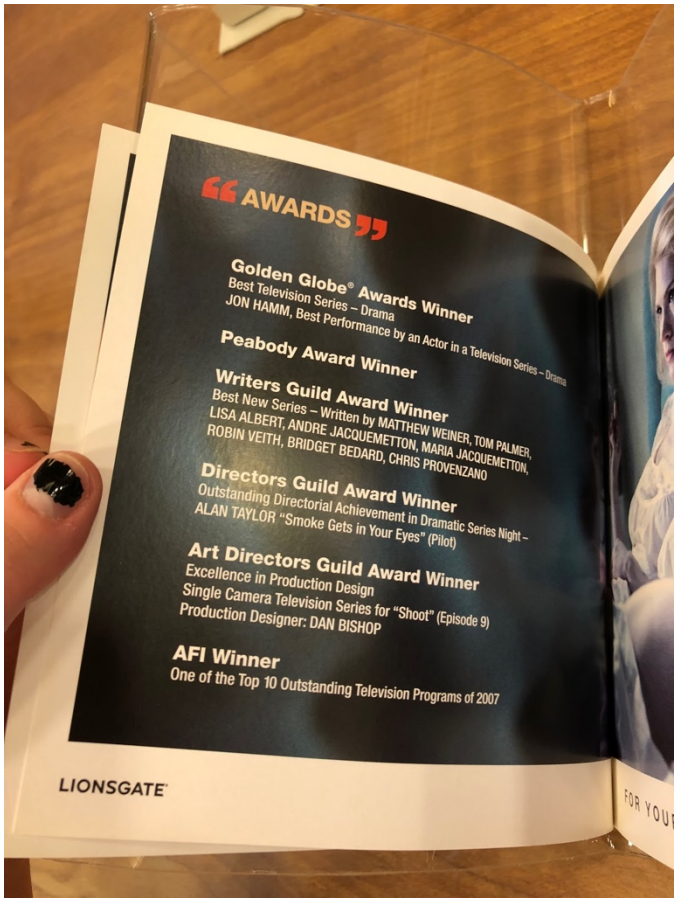
Drama and Best Lead Actor. Golden Globes are bolded in the text to draw the reader's eye toward it.

Illustration 8: Summary of the show from the Emmy For Your Consideration kit[101]

There is an additional page listing more details about the various awards the show has won, a surprisingly large number considering how the show was only in its first season.

[101] Ibid.

Illustration 9: List of awards won by *Mad Men* from the Emmy For Your Consideration kit[102]

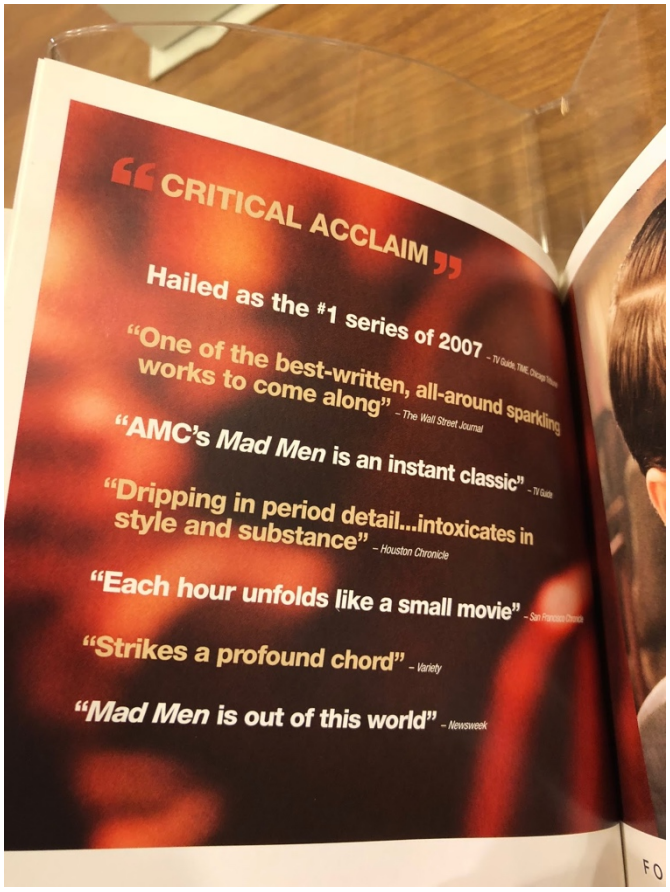


The praise from journalists' pre-air reviews comes full circle here as it appears in the Emmy promotion. *TV Guide* called *Mad Men* "an instant classic,"[103] the *Houston Chronicle* praised the show's style as "dripping in period detail,"[104] and *TV Guide*, *Time* and the *Chicago Tribune* awarded *Mad Men* the ranking of #1 show of 2007. Perhaps the most telling note on the show is the *San Francisco Chronicle*'s praise that "each hour

[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.

unfolds like a small movie,"[105] harkening back to Newman and Levine's theory that the legitimation of television is tied to its cinematic value — a key strategem for a medium to gain cultural legitimacy is to hitch its wagon to one that has already achieved it.

Illustration 10: "Critical Acclaim" quotes from the Emmy For Your Consideration kit[106]



The rest of the booklet is filled with the standard "For Your Consideration" announcements, indicating which actors, episodes, and crew members have submitted for

[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.

award consideration. The "big three"[107] awards are placed on the same booklet page, highlighting their importance and status within the industry. Reading through the rest of the pages, especially the categorization of Supporting and Guest actors and actresses, indicates that the show's producers (or, at least, the PR company that made this promotional booklet) may have a different formulation of recurring and guest actors than I did when framing this study. The difference between Supporting and Lead is blurry within the narrative of the show. Don and Peggy are ostensibly the leads — but Betty, a "Supporting Actress" according to Emmy categorization, is featured prominently in almost every episode, and her character arguably undergoes the most change throughout the season. Maggie Siff, who plays Rachel, also submitted under "Supporting Actress," which is probably an accurate category for her to be in, but she only appears in one episode after season one. Robert Morse is technically a Guest Actor, but he recurs across seven seasons.

There is also the conspicuous absence of most of the guest and one-off characters and the actors' work in these booklets. Even the set design and costuming receive nods for their work in building the show's visual verisimilitude to the 1960s. Despite all the behind-the-scenes labor that went into writing and casting these smaller parts, by this point, these characters are essentially nonessential. Their purpose was to lend visual authenticity to a constructed, fictionalized version of history and provide a pathway to the "quality" that Weiner and AMC were trying to achieve with *Mad Men*. But by the time

[107] Outstanding Drama Series, Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series, Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series

the bit characters' work is reframed and the representation of "history" affixed to Weiner and his creative genius, there is no space in the booklet to consider the work of these smaller parts and actors. In this marketing context, their work does not matter.

CONCLUSION

It's a Time Machine

As seen through the show's production archives, the process of imagining, casting, and marketing the historical world of *Mad Men* was constantly being negotiated during the show's production and distribution. So many of the decisions regarding casting and characters in *Mad Men* are predicated on the fact that the show takes place during the 1960s. Recurring and guest characters who do not get much screen time are described and written to be allegorical stand-ins for '60s stereotypes and ideologies — like costumes or props, they are deployed to make the show a more "accurate" representation of the period in which it takes place. Casting recurring and guest roles is in part determined by the descriptive blueprints set by the show's writers, but even when it comes to evaluating actors' performances and physical appearance, 1960s verisimilitude pulls rank over talent. Although the archives point toward other players who were involved in the production process, by the time *Mad Men* has finished production and the pilot is being marketed to journalists, Matthew Weiner is positioned as the author-god keeper of 1960s knowledge. This construction happens after the fact — the press kits and Emmy mailers in the archives are so important to look at because, as Newman and Levine argue, "quality" is constructed both through critical acclaim by journalists and Emmy consideration.

Notably, the *Mad Men* pilot almost did not take place in 1960. In Weiner's first draft of the pilot, from May 2001, the show is set in Manhattan in 1959. The pilot does not specify what time of year the episode takes place in, which is interesting to consider

because the version of *Mad Men* that aired is always so concerned with time and place. The season started out in the first warm months of New York summer, passing through the stifling midsummer months and ending up around Christmas. Every season is structured around the passage of time, and in the first season many of the bit characters who are introduced have something to do with monthly time and place — Bob Shaw the air conditioning salesman, to name one. Perhaps setting the show in 1960 instead of 1959 does not make much of a difference. But, considering the legacy of the show, the change to 1960 seems a critical amendment between drafts.

With the number of times that the 1960s are mentioned in the archives for the first season, I cannot imagine the show starting out with such an inconspicuous, odd-numbered year as 1959. Perhaps setting the show in 1959 would not diminish its status as a "1960s show," but the archives reveal that even the smallest script changes have weight. Changing one aspect of how a character or a setting is described causes ripples that are felt throughout casting, episode filming, and marketing. *Mad Men* begins in the first months of 1960 and ends with the conclusion of 1970. Although the show was not a particularly faithful representation of the variety of experiences Americans had in the 1960s, the imagined version of the 1960s that the writers and Weiner wanted to represent guided the writing, casting, and marketing of the show at nearly every part of production.

AMC's promotion of *Mad Men*'s final season used the tagline "the end of an era," which is fitting in several ways. The final season takes place in 1970, the end of the decade "era" *Mad Men* took place in. In 2015, *Mad Men*'s final episode marked another sort of "end of an era," as *Mad Men* was the last show of its "quality" cohort to still be

airing new episodes. *Breaking Bad*, *Mad Men*'s partner in that Emmy promotional booklet, had been off the air for several years, and AMC's new offerings were not gathering the critical acclaim or Emmy traction those earlier offerings did. Original series on streaming sites, like *Orange is the New Black* (2013–) on Netflix and *Transparent* (2014–) on Amazon had large ensemble casts and sprawling narrative worlds like *Mad Men*, though Newman and Levine's noted trend of antihero "quality" seemed to have mostly fallen away after the late 2000s. *Mad Men* became history in another way. The University of Texas acquired its archives so researchers like me could sift through the materials and, maybe someday, relate them with even clearer historical hindsight to that bygone era of 2007-2015.

On my last visit to the archives in March of 2018, I noticed that the finding aid was live. I requested a folder that I saw labeled "Casting Notes, Episode 101, 2006." The box was a holy grail of notes about the rounds and rounds of callbacks and auditions for the series' main actors, with in-depth notes of their performances. There were lists of very famous actors that Weiner dreamed might play these parts, and ones who he hoped he might find dollar-store versions of to star in his AMC pilot. If the real Jeff Bridges and Willem Dafoe were not available to play Roger, how could they narrow down that "type" and find an actor who would still satisfy? Part of me is disappointed I did not have more page space or time to include these materials in this project.[108]

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[108] Without the finding aid, I never could have guessed where these pilot casting materials would be. The materials surrounding season one of *Mad Men*, including its promotion, ended up being contained in the first 11 boxes of materials. The pilot casting materials were in box number 157.

But even the less glamorous guest and recurring characters are a fascinating site to examine the ideological specificities of the show's 1960 setting and its production context — 2007, auteur-driven, "quality" cable television — in negotiation. Going through the casting session notes was a challenge in turning off the judgmental part of my brain and trying to see items more fully in their contexts. Rather than jumping to offense at the mentioning of an actor being too "white-voiced" to be a Black elevator operator or an actress "too old" or having too much plastic surgery to play Pete's mom, I tried to situate these audition notes within the production culture of the show, as evidenced in the archives more broadly. I was not able to visit casting sessions for a TV show as Kristen J. Warner was, but I applied the trends she noted in her book (collected around the same time *Mad Men* was casting its first season) to see what wider industry practices shape casting decisions. I also noted Weiner's authorial presence in casting — the audition notes are his own thoughts from casting sessions, but the politics of the notes point more toward larger industry tendencies (and a service to the 1960s setting of the show) than an expression of his showrunner-auteur genius.

If Weiner was rather decentralized in the archives during the production and writing of the show, the construction of *quality* relating to casting and writing brought him back into the spotlight. The press kits sent to journalists prior to the show's premiere and the industry circulated Emmy promotional material both position Weiner as *Mad Men*'s singular auteur and creative genius. Instead of emphasizing their own emerging star power, the actors are described as diamonds in the rough plucked from obscurity by Weiner — or as embodiments of the 1960s, whether that be the classic beauty of Joan or

the actual 1960s theater credits of Robert Morse. Weiner's previous work on *The Sopranos*, the show that many scholars and critics describe as ushering in the post-network, cable-dominated niche TV era, was the driving force of the show's promotional campaign — at least as evidenced by the press kit materials in the archives. Perhaps a more expansive look at trade press and daily newspaper coverage would illuminate other ways the show constructed its alignment with "quality," but the archival press materials show *Mad Men*'s quality as deriving from one person — which is quite different from the collectively authored scripts and consensus of voices in the casting sessions, and the reality of the complex, multi-voiced production culture of a television show.

Television, like film and most other media, is multi-authored at nearly every stage. An "author" is emphasized in "high quality" works because most of the time, to seem "good" and "worth our time" as discerning and educated media consumers, a text should be tied to one person or a small team that created it. The films of Martin Scorsese, including the collection of traits that marks the movies as "his," are seen by many a more legitimate and "quality" object of consumption and study than the music of One Direction, written by dozens of teams of hired songwriters and, only occasionally, the boys themselves. There are several ways to legitimate something that is culturally denigrated, but Newman and Levine focus on the centrality of the showrunner figure as a crucial one for TV. For something to be art, there needs to be an artist.

The showrunner figure, then, is mainly useful as a figure. As my examination of the writing process shows, the *Mad Men* writers' room was a highly collaborative space, with many episodes featuring co-writing credits and lots of character description changes

not traceable through Weiner's own handwritten edits. Though the only notes I had to work with were Weiner's, it appears that the casting process was undertaken mainly with the goals of "accurately" representing the 1960s and fitting along with wider ideological factors. Weiner was the star of *Mad Men*'s marketing campaign, but the press kits and mailers are fascinating as documents, where one can see all the work that went into constructing him as the head figure of the show, giving him sole credit for the characters that the other writers and actors helped create and shape.

I began the first stages of my research with the unequivocal belief that Matthew Weiner was *Mad Men*'s chief architect and artist. Though he did not create *The Sopranos*, I noted similarities in the way the two shows told their stories, the mixture of episodic and serialized storylines, and the empathy they extended toward even the most vile characters. I love television, everything from *The Sopranos* to *The Bachelor* — and as someone who wrote a freshman seminar paper on decentralizing the author, I like to think I have graduated to more complex arguments than "maybe instead of focusing on the powerful white men who most often create this kind of legitimate 'art,' we should extend our focus to the other voices involved in production." Though I still have great affection for *Mad Men* as a TV show, the archives illuminated the fact that its presentation of the 1960s was not as "accurate" as the marketing of the show claimed it to be, and the politics of the production culture behind the scenes left me feeling sour.

During the completion of my research into the show, allegations about sexual misconduct and harassment on the set were publicized for the first time. Weiner's former writing partner Kater Gordon, who joined the writers' room in season two, claimed to

have been verbally harassed and targeted by Weiner. According to Gordon, Weiner was power-hungry and a bully on set, and once said to her "you owe it to me to show me your naked body."[109] Another former *Mad Men* writer (and current well-known Hollywood showrunner), Marti Noxon, called Weiner an "emotional terrorist," and drew a parallel between Weiner's actions and those of the ruthless, often reprehensible characters on the show he created: "Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of the show *Mad Men* could imagine that very line coming from the mouth of Pete Campbell. Matt, Pete's creator, is many things. He is devilishly clever and witty, but he is also, in the words of one of his colleagues, an 'emotional terrorist' who will badger, seduce, and even tantrum in an attempt to get his needs met."[110]

In my research and writing, I initially struggled with how to frame *Mad Men* while not prioritizing Weiner's voice over others. The archives are his, and though he was not the omnipresent central figure of the show's writing, casting, and marketing, there is no denying that Weiner is a key figure on the production of *Mad Men*. I do not believe in separating the art from the artist when it comes to sexual assault and violence, and I do not make excuses for Weiner's behavior on set — whether represented in the archives or through Gordon's and Noxon's narratives about working with him. I have spent enough time with the archives to be cautious of any of the stories Weiner tells about himself to the press. The paper often says something completely different.

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[109] Jessica E. Lessin, "Former 'Mad Men' Writer Starts Nonprofit After Alleged Harassment," *The Information*, November 9, 2017,
[110] Ibid.

I think it is worth taking a step back. Matthew Weiner created *Mad Men*, but the archives offer a glimpse at the other hands that were involved in the production of the show. Though my own study focused on the documents that were most marked-up by Weiner (the revised scripts and handwritten casting notes), the archives also contain the script supervisor and coordinator binders for every episode. In my research I mostly used these binders to help catalog dates for revisions, since pages were often missing from the copies of the script in Weiner's set binders. The fact that these script supervisor binders were even included in the materials was initially a surprise to me; the *UT News* brief did not centralize their acquisition, and without a finding aid, I had no way of knowing they existed. But even though I focused mainly on the materials attributed to Weiner, the fact that these other materials, explicitly attributed to other voices, exist in these archives indicates just how many hands were involved in shaping the narrative of the show — despite efforts to attribute it all to Weiner.

There were several names on the episode binders, depending upon the episode, and I noted that most of the people compiling these unmarked copies of the script were women. Gennifer Hutchison, who would eventually go on to win a writing Emmy of her own for *Breaking Bad*, was Weiner's assistant on the first season of *Mad Men*, and some of the scripts in the coordinated binders belonged to her. Joanna Lovinger compiled others — she was a script supervisor during every season of *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), and apparently now works as a marriage and family therapist in the Los Angeles area. Their contributions should be more than a cursory note in the conclusion of a project written with these archives. I would love to see, or perhaps write myself, another version

of this that even further de-centers Weiner from the show, and focuses on how casting directors like Schiff and Audino or script supervisors and assistants like Lovinger and Hutchison contributed to the production process.

And, to circle back around, I wish I could write another version of this thesis with the production materials from the pilot episode. "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" has such a lore about it — I knew even before visiting the archives myself that Weiner had written the script five years before it was filmed, and he had gotten his job on *The Sopranos* through the brilliance of that spec script alone. Box 1, the only box I came across in the season one files, had just two copies of the script for the episode — an old one from 2001 and John Slattery's shooting script from 2006. The dialogue, action lines, and character descriptions were incredibly similar in both, which made me consider Weiner's rock-solid conception of the show from the beginning. But I wondered how much of my memory was clouded by the lore of Weiner's sole authorial role, and how looking at the rest of the season's scripts, casting notes, and promotional materials undercut that legend. If there is a whole box of casting notes available 146 chronological boxes after I stopped looking, I wonder what other pilot materials might someday emerge here or elsewhere. Of course, other methods — such as interviews with actors, writers, or casting directors, or participant observation on another TV set or writers' room — could help to fill in the gaps in a similar project.

I would be interested to see a project that considers all the stars initially floated for various parts on *Mad Men* — including, among hundreds of others, James Franco as Pete, Paul Rudd as Don, and Gene Wilder as Bert Cooper — and how the show ended up

with its cast of unknowns. Was it Weiner's creative decision to pick unfamiliar faces? AMC and Lionsgate budget constraints? A consensus among dozens of voices, or a combination of all of these factors? Despite me spending four months' worth of weekday afternoons poring over them, the research potential of the *Mad Men* archives has barely begun to be scratched, and I anticipate future research using these materials will help illuminate the production process at different moments.

I hope, then, that students and researchers are not put off by the idea of working closely with documents that Weiner touched. Although the storm of sexual assault allegations against high-powered Hollywood producers has mostly died down since November and December, it is worth noting that where there is one story, there are often many more. For every woman or man who speaks up there are likely many others with parallel experiences. And prior to fall 2017, many of the men who were acting this way on set faced few repercussions for their actions. It was just the way people behaved on set — the casting couch or the harsh reality of being the only woman in the writers' room. There was no reason to change, no reason to act any differently.

One of the things I appreciate about TV is that its prolonged, winding, serialized narratives often seem to convey how rare it is for people and their actions to truly change. Pete Campbell is a dog in season one, and he remains one in season five. Although Peggy becomes one of the most powerful copywriters at Sterling Cooper, she still has affection and loyalty toward Don, even as his luck begins to sour. Don is always, always running away, never learning, always trying to remake himself and not get caught in regret for what he left behind. I want to say it reminds me of *The Sopranos*' shared family

psychological curses, but connecting these two entries of Weiner's oeuvre would be giving him (and the broader cultural taste hierarchies of "quality TV") another easy point.

Instead, I will take us back to "The Wheel," back to history and snapshots. Don's pitch speech during "The Wheel" draws parallels between the machinery of the Kodak carousel and the human desire to capture and display memory. The carousel is a slide projector — the flick of a button lets the machine pass from image to image, scene to scene. Don pitches: "It's a time machine. It goes backwards, forwards. It takes us to a place where we ache to go again. It's not called 'The Wheel.' It's called 'The Carousel.' It lets us travel the way a child travels — around and around, back home again — to a place where we know we are loved."[111]

There is something appealing about *Mad Men*'s 1960 setting. It seems far away, the racism and misogyny a funhouse mirror of contemporary society's issues, the workplace harassment much worse back then by comparison. The visuals of the 1960s are striking and cool, a place for set design and costuming to shine. The New Hollywood movies of the 1960s are a fascinating place of change and creativity, and film geeks who watch TCM and AMC may be drawn to something like *Mad Men* because of the period alone.

Even the experience of sifting through the *Mad Men* archives was inherently nostalgic. After months looking through the materials in the archives and researching the key players back at home, I felt like I had gotten to know the writers, casting directors,

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[111] Matthew Weiner and Robin Veith, "The Wheel," *Mad Men* season one episode 13, directed by Matthew Weiner, aired October 18, 2007 on AMC, accessed via Netflix U.S.

and actors. As I moved from pre-production to production, I was sorry to see their names crop up fewer and fewer times, knowing how key their performances were, and knowing how *Mad Men* would not have received the acclaim or status it did without their work. I do not want to discount the work that Jon Hamm, Elisabeth Moss, and the other principals did on the show — *Mad Men* would not have been the show it was without their memorable performances. But the impossibly small list of names *Mad Men* submitted to the Best Guest Actor and Actress Emmy categories[112] made me wish there were more outlets to recognize the work of the people whose "period faces" and "good types" made this show look like the '60s.

And I do not want to throw Matthew Weiner away or write him out of *Mad Men*'s history. He wrote some brilliant episodes of the show, and it was fascinating to see his handwritten notes and see how many of them made it into typed, hard copy and were translated visually onscreen. Reading the archives alongside Newman and Levine, I understand Weiner's utility as an authorial figure. He is the name on the archive boxes, the person who collects the Emmys onstage. Weiner is the face of the show, a necessary vehicle in this 2000s era when Davids Chase, Milch, and Simon were the kings of HBO and shows were pressured to set themselves apart from the rest of TV with some creative figurehead. He was influential in these various moments of pre-production and production, of course, but he was not the only person working on this show. In this project, I set out to challenge Weiner's centrality, even if his name was printed on every

[112] Only Robert Morse (Bert Cooper) and Rosemarie DeWitt (Midge) submitted for Best Guest Actor/Actress for season one.

box. The fact that this much fascinating material on writing, casting, and marketing was taken from such a small selection of these archives forecasts an exciting wealth of future scholarship for which the archives can be utilized.

As events recede into memory, the stories around the periphery begin to disappear. Certain stories stick, but other narratives fade into the distance. As we move further and further from the 2000s-era, basic cable, "quality" TV landscape *Mad Men* inhabited, we must be careful not to idealize the past as Weiner and the writers did with the 1960s — to take Weiner's centrality to the show at face value, to leave the legend of *Mad Men* unchallenged. There are so many stories to be plucked from the materials and told in full.

Looked at in the abstract, the past is comforting. But looked at in detail, slide by slide and page by archival page, you see them reaching back through today. Maybe not that much has changed.

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